

# MEETING SUMMARY

## WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, December 9, 2020, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

*By Webinar and Teleconference Only*

### ATTENDEES

**Steering Committee:** Liz Dent (ODF), Kim Kratz (NOAA Fisheries/NMFS), Tere O'Rourke (NOAA Fisheries/NMFS), Paul Henson (USFWS), Jennifer Wigal (DEQ), Bill Ryan (DSL), Doug Cottam (ODFW), Dan Edge OSU)

**Technical Consultant and Guests:** Troy Rahmig (ICF), David Zippin (ICF)

**Facilitation Team:** Cindy Kolomechuk (ODF), Brett Brownscombe (Oregon Consensus), Deb Nudelman and Sylvia Ciborowski (Kearns & West)

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Liz Dent, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), welcomed Steering Committee (SC) members and opened the meeting.

Deb Nudelman, Kearns & West, reviewed the agenda which included: 1) Agency updates and stakeholder engagement updates, 2) HCP update and process timeline, 3) NEPA update, 4) Herbicide coverage update, 5) Terrestrial species habitat thresholds, 6) HCA management, 7) Overview of the terrestrial monitoring program, 8) SC direction to the Scoping Team (ST), and 9) Approach going forward and next steps.

Deb announced that she'll be stepping out as lead facilitator and Sylvia Ciborowski, Kearns & West, will be stepping into the main facilitator role for the Western Oregon HCP.

### AGENCY UPDATES AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

SC members provided the following updates relevant to the Western Oregon HCP process:

- **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW):** The governor's budget came out and overall things look good, but the agency is losing a few positions. There is a proposal to create a habitat division within the agency.
- **Department of State Lands (DSL):** 1) In the governor's budget the agency is held flat. 2) The Land Board voted to continue the pursuit of the Elliott Forest HCP. Work is

continuing on that effort. The advisory committee was unanimous support in moving forward.

- **ODF:** 1) A joint stakeholder meeting was held last week. There were a lot of comments and some confusion over the overlapping NEPA, FMP and HCP processes so we will strive to do better education on these. There was also question around whether trees should be scattered or clumped in harvest areas, but not a lot of other specific concern or comments mentioned. 2) The agency is developing the Santiam Short-Term Implementation Plan which will outline salvage plans and long-term view of reforestation that sets the long-term vision of what the agency wants the forest to look like for GPV.
- **United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS):** 1) Provided an update on short-term work on the spotted owl critical habitat revision. 2) a decision is likely on the uplisting of spotted owl from threatened to endangered. 3) A lot is going on with sage grouse. 4) There are many retirements in the agency. The agency has been able to hire new staff, including Eileen Stone who may help out on this HCP effort.
- **DEQ:** Leah Feldon had her baby!
- **NOAA Fisheries:** Several leadership staff will be retiring this year.
- **OSU:** In the governor's budget OSU is held flat.

Deb noted that stakeholder meetings with industry, conservation and recreation stakeholders will be held in late January to early February.

## **HCP UPDATE AND PROCESS TIMELINE**

Troy Rahmig, ICF noted that there are a number of technical topics that we are looking to cover today. He covered at a broad level the topics that the ST has been discussing in the past weeks.

He shared the HCP/EIS/FMP schedule for 2021-2022:

- ST members will be reviewing a revised draft of HCP chapters at the beginning of the year (January – February), this is an opportunity to see how feedback was incorporated. The team can make adjustments as needed.
- The NEPA process and development of companion FMP will begin in spring 2021.
- A separate public process will take place for the FMP development.

## **NEPA UPDATE**

Tere O'Rourke, NOAA Fisheries, provided an update on NEPA:

- NOAA Fisheries is working on a schedule to show the NEPA process.
- The agency is engaged in pre-NEPA tasks currently.

- EPA also has an oversight role and is in charge of signing off on the final EIS.
- The agency is working to put the Purpose and Need and proposed action together. The Purpose and Need sets the stage for the analysis and the decision-space regarding alternatives, and NOAA Fisheries is seeking to keep it simple and short. The Steering Committee will have an opportunity to take a look at the draft Purpose and Need.
- The NEPA process officially begins with the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register. The hope is to do this in early March. The Notice of Intent will include the Purpose and Need and the agency anticipates public comments and suggestions on the Purpose and Need.
- New NEPA regulations have come out and the agency is working to understand work through this process with a future where the NEPA regulations might change.
- NOAA Fisheries is meeting with ODF to understand the BOF decision-making process.
- In order to complete NEPA in the tight timeframe, it will be important for the SC agencies to make it a priority, which means ensuring adequate staffing resources. The SC will be asked to review the NEPA schedule and commit to following it.

## **Discussion**

SC members discussed NEPA and provided the following questions and comments:

- Industry and conservation groups made comments about the Purpose and Need at the joint stakeholder meeting.
- It will be important to clarify the NEPA alternatives development with stakeholders and the BOF. It will also be important to help stakeholders understand the most appropriate venue for their specific type of input (i.e., NEPA public process and the companion FMP development).

## **TERRESTRIAL SPECIES HABITAT THRESHOLDS**

Troy provided an update on Terrestrial Species Habitat Thresholds. He noted:

- Reviewed a summary of HSI thresholds by species which help define suitable, highly suitable, and not habitat for marbled murrelet and red tree vole; as well as nesting, roosting, foraging, dispersal, and not habitat for northern spotted owl.
- Over the course of the permit term, there is growth of habitat for all terrestrial species. This habitat growth is occurring primarily inside of HCAs.
- The team has done work to tie the habitat growth to acreage commitments in the biological goals and objectives (BGOs). There is also more specificity in the BGOs to show the number of acres by habitat type over the course of the permit term for each species.

## Discussion

The SC discussed and provided the following questions and comments:

- The information seems understandable.
- Anticipate confusion around terminology for the northern spotted owl (NSO) habitat types. May need to clarify that nesting/roosting habitat also includes dispersal habitat.

## HCA MANAGEMENT

Troy provided an update on management in HCAs under the HCP:

- Described the reasons why ODF may go in to do management in HCAs, which include: management in healthy conifer stands to accelerate development of covered species habitat, treatment of swiss needle cast stands, and conifer restoration in hardwood-dominated stands. In all of these cases, management would focus on improving covered species habitat.
- The ST has asked for sideboards around the pace and scale of these activities.
- Reviewed management activities permissible in NSO habitat, broken out by habitat type. In higher quality habitat, less management is permissible and fewer silvicultural activities are permissible. In lower quality habitat, there will be more acreage that is managed and more silvicultural activities are allowed because lower quality habitat needs treatment to become higher quality habitat.
- The intention of monitoring would be to see how species are responding to these management activities over time to make sure ODF is getting the habitat growth results they are expecting.
- This information will be located in Conservation Action 8 in the HCP.
- The ST has been discussing management outside of HCAs as well, including standards for leave trees and snag retention. There have been some minor changes and additional clarifications to this piece since it was presented to the Board of Forestry in September.

## Discussion

The SC discussed and provided the following questions and comments:

- ODF clarified the amount and location of swiss needle cast and alder stands on the landscape. Restoration in alder stand recognizes that management is beneficial for establishing forest canopy.
- Question around whether restoration management would be frontloaded in the permit term.

- Troy responded that in general, much of the restoration management is frontloaded within the first 30 years of the permit. There will be some prioritization to target areas that would provide the greatest benefit in the first ten years.
- The information seems very clear and transparent.

## **TERRESTRIAL MONITORING UPDATE**

Troy provided an update on terrestrial monitoring.

- The monitoring program includes 1) Habitat monitoring that is meant to monitor compliance and to determine whether there is an increase in habitat quality and quantity over time, as well as 2) Species monitoring to determine how species are responding to the conservation actions.
- The HCP acknowledges that there is an expectation that habitat models will improve over time, and that those will be used for habitat monitoring.
- Monitoring will be tracked annually but reported out at five-year increments. This allows for adjustments during 5-year midpoint check-ins. Monitoring will also inform the 10-year Implementation Plan process.
- The initial monitoring focus would be on monitoring to understand distribution of key terrestrial species (torrent salamanders, OSS, red tree vole, and coastal marten). Since there is a lot known about NSO and marbled murrelet, there is less need to understand distribution of these species. There would also be an initial focus on monitoring to inform minimization measures, as well as focused monitoring to document the species response and rate of species persistence after covered activities occur.
- There will be monitoring for NSO and marbled murrelet to continue to track occupancy in active NSO sites and murrelet designated occupied habitat, to monitor improving habitat for new colonization, as well as monitoring in locations where barred owl management may be occurring.
- Monitoring is a rolling monitoring program that is not tied to the timber harvest schedule. In some cases, timber harvest plans may be informed by monitoring.

### **Discussion**

The SC discussed and provided the following questions and comments:

- Question about when adaptive management will occur.
  - Troy responded that this could occur during anytime during the HCP, but major systematic changes would likely occur in response to the 10-year check-ins.
- Question about how there will be long-term certainty that monitoring will be funded, and where the budget is coming from.

- ODF responded that the dollars are coming from ODF from timber dollars. ODF would look to collaborate and leverage resources in the future as well. Troy added that ODFW would ramp up its existing annual monitoring program as well and ensure there is monitoring across the HCP permit area. Aquatic monitoring would be densified in the permit area using ODF dollars.
- Suggest use of eDNA as a cheaper way to monitor, especially in the future. Troy noted that the HCP mentions eDNA, particularly= for torrent salamander, but the HCP also leaves flexibility for the method of monitoring to be able have flexibility over the life of the permit term.

## **HERBICIDE COVERAGE UPDATE**

Liz Dent, ODF, framed the update on herbicide coverage, noting that there have been small group meetings with agencies to discuss whether to include use of herbicides as a covered activities.

ODF currently uses aerial and ground application of herbicides as a part of site preparation and to improve reforestation success. There is public concern on herbicides, especially aerial application of herbicides. USFWS has expressed concern about how to quantify impacts of herbicide use on slender salamander. Note that the petition to list slender salamander has been rescinded by the Center for Biological Diversity. However, ODF has decided to keep it as a covered species.

ODF proposes including ground application as a covered activity in the HCP, with monitoring to understand potential impacts on slender salamander. The team is also coming up with BMPs that would apply in the North Cascades (which is where slender salamander occurs) to minimize effects to the species.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE DIRECTION TO SCOPING TEAM**

The next ST meeting is Tuesday, January 5.

The SC message to the ST is that it is critical at this point to flag any major issues with the HCP. If there are any major outstanding substantive issues, they should be elevated to the right representatives on the SC at this point. It is not appropriate to wait until January on this.

Deb encouraged SC members to share this message individually with their ST counterpart as well.

## **NEXT STEPS AND SUMMARY**

The next SC meeting will be held on January 28 and that will be a joint ST-SC meeting. In that joint meeting, it will be helpful to do a check-in to make sure there is alignment and flag any final issues.