

Agenda Item No.:	8
Work Plan:	State Forests Work Plan
Topic:	State Forests Management
Presentation Title:	State Forests Habitat Conservation Plan Update
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CONTEXT

The Board of Forestry (BOF) has directed staff to continue exploring options for enhancing financial viability while increasing conservation outcomes, including the pursuit of a programmatic ESA compliance tool, such as a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). State forestlands in western Oregon to be considered in this HCP scoping project total 639,269 acres. The majority of these lands (96%, or 613,577 acres) are owned by the BOF, and the remaining 4% (25,692 acres) are Common School Forest Lands (CSFL) owned by the State Land Board. The plan area does not include the CSFL in the Elliott State Forest.

The State Forests Division developed a 3-phase approach to explore the possibility of a Western Oregon HCP. The Board of Forestry (BOF) approved this approach in November 2017. In 2018, the Division completed Phase 1: HCP Initiation and Scoping, and the BOF directed the Division to begin work on Phase 2: Strategy Development.

This work has been funded by a \$750,000 federal grant (\$250,000 match) United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Technical Assistance grant, which was expended in August, 2019. The Division was recently awarded an additional USFWS Technical Assistance grant in the same amount to support the development of the 1st Administrative Draft of the HCP.

In October, 2020 the Division will present the 1st Administrative Draft of the HCP to the Board, who will be asked to determine if it is in the best interest of the state to continue to Phase 3: NEPA analysis and consultation. If so directed, the Division will work with NOAA Fisheries and USFWS to complete the NEPA process. It is anticipated that this process will take 18 months to complete. During this time, the Division will also be completing the companion Forest Management Plan. In June 2022, the Board will be asked to determine if it is in the best interest of the state to approve the Western Oregon HCP and the companion Forest Management Plan (FMP).

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

During the HCP initiation phase, the Division hired Oregon Consensus and Kearns and West to assist with stakeholder engagement and facilitation needs. ICF and EcoNorthwest were hired to assist with developing the content of the HCP. These consultants, in coordination with Division staff, serve as the HCP Project Team.

In 2018, Oregon Consensus and Kearns and West assisted the Division in developing a multi-agency governance structure to support the HCP planning process. This includes a Steering Committee comprised of policy-level representatives from state and federal agencies, and a Scoping Team comprised of technical representatives from state and federal wildlife agencies. The Steering Committee and the Scoping Team serve as the Planning Teams that will lead the development of a potential Western Oregon HCP.

WESTERN OREGON HCP PHASE 2 UPDATES

Conservation Strategy Development

The Scoping Team is currently developing and evaluating potential conservation strategies designed to meet the Biological Goals and Objectives for each covered species. Conservation strategies are based on the ecosystem processes needed to support the persistence of the covered species. The Scoping Team is using the best available science to develop strategies that address these critical processes across the landscape. This includes current and historic data as well as modeled data for both aquatic and terrestrial species.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy: Riparian

The aquatic strategy is focused on the ecosystem processes that address the primary limiting factors for the covered aquatic species: wood recruitment, retaining cold water, and reducing sedimentation. The Division procured the services of Terrain Works to assess the ability of proposed strategies to address these limiting factors. Specifically, Terrain Works is evaluating potential wood delivery and reduction of temperature impacts (climate change) associated with proposed strategies. Recognizing that contributions to wood, temperature, and sediment are variable throughout the landscape, the strategies will be tailored to protect the aquatic features that provide the greatest contributions to these ecosystem processes.

The Aquatic Conservation Strategy is comprised of the following: Riparian Conservation Areas (buffers), stream enhancement projects, fish passage improvements, and management of the roads network (weather related road use restrictions, drainage, proper location of new roads, road decommissioning). Collectively, these strategies will meet the following objectives: promote long-term wood recruitment, enhance overall channel complexity, maintain and enhance water quantity and quality, and improve fish passage over time.

The size and extent of the Riparian Conservation Area (RCA) is being informed by the Terrain Works modeling effort, as well as the best available science related to stream function. Variation in the RCA is informed by fish use, stream size, location in the watershed, and potential for debris flows, slope failures, and landslides. There will be little to no management within the RCA. Any potential management would be targeted to achieve mature forest conditions, and would not be commercially driven.

Terrestrial Conservation Strategy

The terrestrial strategy is focused on the processes that provide habitat and promote ecosystem connectivity to allow covered species to utilize habitat across the landscape. The primary objectives of the terrestrial strategies are to conserve, maintain, and enhance occupied habitat and suitable habitat (where occupancy is known), and increase the quality and quantity of habitat over the permit term.

We are using a combination of current and historic data as well as newly developed species habitat models to develop Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs) that will protect multiple covered species over the permit term. ODF worked collaboratively with ICF and the Scoping Team to develop species models for Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Red Tree Vole, and Oregon Slender Salamander. These models were reviewed by a panel of experts to validate the modeling approach.

In drafting the HCAs the Division first considered survey data and supplemented with model data where needed. A growth model is also used to anticipate changes to habitat over time, in addition to species and model data. A tiered approach is used to construct an HCA, beginning with the Northern Spotted Owl, then overlaying Marbled Murrelet, and incorporating Red Tree Vole information. Because the Oregon Slender Salamander and Coastal Marten have limited survey and modeled data, the Division will evaluate how the needs of these species are met by strategies developed for other covered terrestrial species, and refine as needed. Torrent Salamanders will be addressed by the aquatic strategy.

The HCAs strive for more contiguous areas, and seek to optimize ecosystem and habitat function for all covered terrestrial species, while retaining flexibility for covered activities outside of the HCAs. The size of these areas may be influenced by the ability to manage for multiple benefits within the HCA.

The Western Oregon State Forests HCP enables the Division to move away from the single species, reactive approach to conservation currently employed under take avoidance. Rather, the Division will be able to think more holistically and proactively about a variety of species and align their habitats to get the greatest conservation benefits while retaining economic viability. In large part, the areas already designated as good habitat will continue to be protected, but they may be reconfigured to create connectivity and to improve ecosystem function.

Forest Goals and Objectives

The Conservation Strategies described above are designed to meet the Biological Goals and Objectives for the covered species to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The mission, vision, and goals of the HCP recognize that, in addition to meeting ESA requirements for covered species, ODF's forest management activities must also address the full suite of benefits articulated in the Greatest Permanent Value Rule (GPV).

As such, the Division created Forest Goals and Objectives (Attachment 1) to provide foundation for the Forest Management Plan that would complement the HCP. Should the Board direct the Division to continue working toward an HCP in October 2020, staff will develop this companion FMP to meet management objectives for all forest resources required by the Forest Planning Rule. Collectively, implementation of the conservation and timber management strategies associated with the Biological Goals and Objectives and the Forest Goals and Objectives will ensure that we comply with the ESA, and meet GPV.

Timber Harvest Modeling

The Division is working with ICF to conduct policy-level timber harvest modeling to support the development of the HCP. The intent is to apply draft conservation strategies to the harvest scheduling model to evaluate the relative outcomes among potential harvesting and conservation actions. As an applicant, ODF must be able to demonstrate implementation of the HCP can be afforded. The policy-level timber harvest model will provide the information necessary to refine the conservation strategies that minimize and mitigate impacts to the maximum extent practicable, and develop harvest strategies that will generate sufficient revenue to implement the HCP.

This policy-level modeling is not intended to provide actual volume or revenue outputs, but simply to help inform the decision in October on whether or not to move forward with submission of the first Administrative Draft of the HCP into the NEPA process. Implementation modeling may begin once the conservation and general timber harvest strategies have agreed upon, and will provide more refined estimates of conservation and timber harvest outcomes.

HCP Stakeholder Engagement Update

Public engagement is critical for an effective HCP process. The goals of the stakeholder engagement process are to provide a variety of touch points to keep a diversity of stakeholders informed, and provide a venue for efficient exchange of ideas and information as work products are developed (see Attachment 2: Western Oregon HCP Stakeholder Engagement).

It begins with a series of quarterly HCP Update meetings open to the public, where draft work products that are developed by the Planning Teams are presented. These meetings are designed to provide information regarding HCP work products, solicit feedback, and gauge the interest for more in-depth, targeted meetings with Project Team members. Following the HCP Update meetings, the Project Team meets with stakeholders individually and in focus groups to further the discussion and gather feedback for the Steering Committee and the Scoping Team to consider.

The Project Team has engaged three focus groups in the development of the conservation strategies: recreation, forest industry, and conservation advocates. These focus groups are, in large part, self-selected and are given an opportunity to help design agendas that will speak to their interests. Since our last update in November 2019, we have worked with these focus groups to better understand their goals and concerns around potential conservation strategies. Meeting notes from these focus group meetings are shared with

the Scoping Team and the Steering Committee to ensure their ideas are considered as these Planning Teams develop the conservation strategies.

In addition, the State Forester recently hosted meetings with industry and conservation stakeholders interested in the modeling associated with conservation strategy development. Subsequent meetings with these groups were held to bring technical expertise from all perspectives into the conversation.

Due to the special relationship with the Forest Trustland Advisory Committee (FTLAC), the Division has provided regular updates on the HCP process and work products. These FTLAC updates are focused on addressing the unique interests of the FTLAC members to better integrate their perspectives in a meaningful way. Many FTLAC members attend the meetings that are open to the public and provide valuable feedback in this forum as well. Coordination with the FTLAC was paused during the Linn County trial in late fall, and we are now working with the Counties to continue to advance opportunities for communication and collaboration.

To date, there have been five HCP Update Meetings open to the public. Last year, these meetings were held in March, June, and October. Despite the Covid-19 crisis, the Division held a very well-attended webinar meeting open to the public in March 2020, where 85 Oregonians joined the HCP conversation. Our most recent HCP Update meeting open to the public was July 13th 2020, and focused on presenting updates toward conservation strategy development. All meetings include a webinar option for those that are not able to attend in person.

The Project Team has conducted over 40 stakeholder meetings to engage interested parties in the HCP process. In addition, updates are provided at State Forests Advisory Committee (SFAC), Conservation Collaboration, and Industry adhoc meetings.

The Division has also been working to engage tribes with ancestral ties to lands within the HCP Plan Area. In December 2019, Division staff (Liz Dent and Cindy Kolomechuk) joined State Forester Daugherty in attending the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Tribal Council. This introductory meeting provided an opportunity to better understand the history and values of the Grand Ronde. The Tribal Council expressed an interest in the HCP, and invited the Division to give a presentation on the HCP at a future Tribal Council meeting.

State Forests Management Comparative Analysis

The Business Case Analysis conducted for Phase 1 of the Western Oregon State Forests Habitat Conservation Plan process focused on differences in financial outcomes between an HCP and the current (2010) take-avoidance FMP. In the absence of a draft HCP, this analysis relied on a number of assumptions. In addition, it did not include the full range of benefits to Oregonians required under GPV, including environmental and social benefits. In November 2018, the Board asked the Division to revisit this analysis once the HCP draft is complete to reduce assumptions and include additional environmental and social benefits.

In tandem with development of the HCP, the Division is also revising the 2010 take-avoidance FMP. ODF has determined that it will be useful to apply the Comparative Analysis to the current take-avoidance FMP, the revised take-avoidance FMP, and the HCP to provide a single, consistent, comprehensive method for comparing these forest management options. This analysis is currently under development, and will be used to assist the Board in evaluating whether to continue working toward an HCP in October 2020.

RECOMMENDATION

Information Only.

NEXT STEPS

The Division and its contractors will continue work toward a Western Oregon HCP to develop an administrative draft of the Western Oregon State Forests HCP and the Comparative Analysis. Specific steps include:

- Implement an HCP public engagement process.
- Continue developing 1st Administrative Draft of the Western Oregon HCP
- Continue developing the Comparative Analysis
- Present Phase 2 outcomes to the Board in October 2020

ATTACHMENTS

1. Forest Goals and Objectives for the Western Oregon HCP
2. Western Oregon State Forests HCP Stakeholder Engagement