

Western Oregon State Forest HCP

Highlights and Key Elements

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Introduction

The proposed Draft Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) would provide conservation benefits for 17 covered species across the 635,000 acre permit area over the 70 -year permit term. The HCP conservation strategy is complex and it can be difficult to discern the key elements and the expected benefits to covered species. The following includes a summary of those key conservation elements, as well as additional highlights of the HCP and next steps for the process.

Key Conservation Elements of the Proposed Draft HCP

The HCP includes an integrated conservation strategy that involves a combination of specific land designations in riparian and terrestrial habitats, coupled with targeted management activities aimed at increasing habitat value for the covered species over time. Ultimately the conservation strategy would increase the quality and quantity of habitat for the covered species, as described in the HCP biological goals and objectives. Below is a more detailed accounting of the benefits to covered species.

Aquatic Conservation Strategies and Expected Outcomes

- Establish riparian conservation areas (i.e., buffers) that address key ecological processes important for covered fish and aquatic salamanders (i.e., wood recruitment, temperature, and sediment management).
- Implemented a process protection zone above fish-bearing streams to minimize temperature increase (<0.3 degrees Celsius) in stream before it flows into fish-bearing streams and promote wood delivery.
- Improve operational efficiency with clear management standards.
- Dedicated funding for aquatic enhancement projects.
- Commitment to complete stream restoration projects to benefit covered species.

Terrestrial Conservation Strategies and Expected Outcomes

- Dedication of nearly 50% of the permit area as Habitat Conservation Areas (275,000 acres).
- Management in HCAs is designed to improved covered species habitat.
- Robust retention standards outside HCAs (leave trees, snags, downed wood) to promote long-term ecological function.
- Leave tree strategy focused on trees with key habitat characteristics (e.g., largest and oldest trees, trees with key habitat features).
- No harvest of old-growth trees (>175 yrs. old).
- Use of terrestrial habitat models instead of typical surrogates (e.g., tree age and size).

- Integrated species habitat models with harvest models to estimate quality over time to ensure that habitat development stays ahead of habitat lost to harvest.
- Expect an increase in habitat quality and quantity. Suitable habitat acres for covered species will increase by the end of the permit term:
 - Northern Spotted Owl nesting, roosting, foraging habitat = 67% increase
 - Marbled murrelet nesting habitat = 94% increase
 - Red tree vole habitat = 84% increase
 - Oregon slender salamander habitat = 19% increase
 - Coastal marten = management of 25,000 acres of habitat in permit area
- Dedicated funding for habitat enhancement (reforestation and young stand management) in HCAs designed specifically for covered species.
- Dedicated funding and commitment for barred owl management, primarily on the north coast.

Monitoring

- Long-term partnership with ODFW to complete aquatic habitat resources monitoring in the permit area.
- Expansive monitoring program for terrestrial species to track changes in habitat quality and quantity.
- Species response monitoring to determine how covered species are responding to conservation actions.
- Linking monitoring program with ODF implementation planning to apply adaptive management where necessary.

Establishing Conservation Fund

- Timber harvest dollars set aside for species conservation.
- Dedicated funding sources for conservation actions provides certainty over time.
- Every harvest operation contributes to the conservation fund.
- Allows conservation actions (e.g., restoration) to occur commensurate with potential effects from harvest activities (i.e., the more harvest that occurs the more conservation funding is generated).

Relationship of the Proposed Draft HCP to the Clean Water Act

- The HCP provides species and critical habitat protection to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), not the Clean Water Act (CWA).
- Habitat for covered aquatic species involves solid components (e.g., large woody debris, bed and banks, riparian zone) and liquid components (e.g., water quality and quantity).
- Water temperature is a key water quality parameter for the suitability of aquatic habitat and an important limiting factor for the covered species.

- The temperature water quality standard in Oregon, promulgated as required by the CWA, is designed for protecting the most temperature sensitive beneficial use: salmonids and other cold-water species (which includes the covered species).
- Therefore, achieving the water quality standard for temperature (i.e., keeping management-related temperature increases above background from exceeding 0.3 degrees Celsius) within State Forest lands is a key part of protecting habitat for covered aquatic species.
- For these reasons, HCP requirements may also serve as steps towards achieving CWA water quality standards. But where water quality standards are not met, the TMDL development process could determine that additional actions are necessary to achieve water quality standards.

Certainty of Forest Management Objectives

- Clear delineation of conservation areas and management standards for the permit area overall will increase certainty on expectations around timber harvest, both at the stand and landscape level over time.
- Biological goals and objectives for covered species will provide long term certainty around conservation goals, especially around properly functioning aquatic and riparian habitat, and native wildlife that are tied to late seral forests.
- Elimination of operationally tied “take avoidance” surveys will simplify logistical issues in planning and execution of operations. This will provide additional certainty and efficiency that may have a positive effect on timber sale bid amounts, as well as provide additional flexibility in the timing of timber sale offerings to better align with market conditions.
- Recreation, Education and Interpretation program development will benefit from increased certainty around strategic planning for infrastructure development.

Next Steps for the Proposed Draft HCP and NEPA Process

- The HCP development process began in 2018 and it is still underway. The draft HCP was developed in collaboration with state and federal agencies through a Scoping Team and Steering Committee process. These groups are expected to continue to meet through 2023.
- The 1st Administrative Draft of the HCP is expected to be available on ODF’s website in late March or April 2021.
- The NEPA process began on March 8, 2021 with publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The 30-day NEPA Scoping process will take place between March 8 and April 7, 2021. A NEPA Public Scoping Meeting will be held on March 31, 2021. The public will be invited to make scoping comments during this 30-day period.
- The public will have an opportunity to make comments on the Draft EIS during the NEPA Public Review and Comment Period in late 2021/early 2022.
- It is expected that the Board of Forestry will make a final decision on the HCP and the FMP in February 2023.

Implementation of Forest Management During HCP Development

- Forest harvest and management activities will continue while the HCP process, including the NEPA analysis, is completed.
- Once the HCP and Companion FMP are approved by the Board of Forestry ODF's forest management practices will be consistent with those described in the HCP.
- Until the Board of Forestry approves the final HCP and FMP ODF will continue to manage state forests under the current FMP that was approved by the Board of Forestry in 2010.
- Implementation of forest management activities will be conducted in compliance with the endangered species act under ODF's take avoidance policy and processes, just as they have in the past.