

MEETING SUMMARY

WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP SCOPING TEAM

Wednesday, March 18, 2020, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

By Webinar/Video Conference

ATTENDEES

Participants: Nick Palazzotto (ODF), Rich Szlemp (USFWS), Rod Krahmer (ODFW), Julie Firman (ODFW), Jim Muck (NOAA Fisheries) Ryan Singleton (DSL), Brian Pew (ODF)

Technical Consultant and Guests: Troy Rahmig (ICF), Aaron Gabbe (ICF), Randy Smith (ODF), Corey Grinnell (ODF)

Facilitation Team: Cindy Kolomechuk (ODF), Sylvia Ciborowski (Kearns & West), Deb Nudelman (Kearns & West)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Deb Nudelman (Kearns & West) welcomed members. Meeting participants introduced themselves.

Deb reviewed the agenda, which included: 1) Agency updates and stakeholder engagement updates, 2) Model updates and comparisons, 3) Review and discuss Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs), 4) Discuss authorized activities in HCAs, 5) Confirm topics for Steering Committee (SC) update, and 6) Approach going forward, next steps, and summary.

Deb explained the purpose of the meeting is to review updates to the modeling and strive for Scoping Team (ST) alignment. Any outstanding issues or questions on the models can be addressed offline. Today's meeting also includes discussion on the HCAs and discussion of the activities that may be authorized within those HCAs, with the goal of seeking general alignment on those activities.

AGENCY UPDATES

Members provided the following updates relevant to the Western Oregon State Forests HCP process:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW): The timeline for submittal of the marbled murrelet status update has been revised in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF): 1) ODF provided an update on the agency's guidelines on remote work and response to the COVID-19 outbreak. 2) There have been changes to the April 22-23 BOF meeting. There will no longer be an HCP update on April 22; the meeting will instead likely discuss the Siskiyou and riparian rules and the Forest Management Plan (FMP). Additionally, the April 23 meeting was slated to be a full day focused on the FMP but has since been cancelled. 3) The HCP will also not be on the April Forest Trust Land Advisory Committee (FTLAC) meeting agenda.

UPDATE ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Deb provided an update on stakeholder engagement efforts. A virtual meeting open to public is scheduled for March 30. The meeting will discuss the approach and development of the conservation strategies, including an overview of the riparian strategy and the methods used to develop conceptual HCAs. Additionally, a webinar meeting is also scheduled to discuss modeling with conservation and industry stakeholders on April 8.

MODEL UPDATES AND COMPARISONS

Troy Rahmig, ICF, explained updates have been made to the modeling. Today, the team will provide updates on the new data and information used in the models, explain how the models have been updated based on past ST input, and show the comparisons between the HCP model and other published models.

Aaron Gabbe, ICF, presented the model updates for the following terrestrial species. The key topics of the presentation are as follows:

Red Tree Vole:

- The red tree vole model was reviewed by Mark Linnell of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) Pacific Northwest Research Station. Mark's key feedback included:
 - The parameters and suitability thresholds in the model seem appropriate.
 - Suggested incorporating specific north coast modeling region into the model and see if they differ from the mean values used.
 - Recommended weighting the large tree parameter more heavily than other parameters.
 - Clarify why a new model is being developed for this HCP, rather than simply overlaying the Forsman et al. (2016) model onto the HCP permit area.
- Revisions being made to the red tree vole HCP model in response to this expert review include:

- Evaluate north coast modeling region parameter values and revise parameters in the HCP model if necessary.
- Increase weight of the large tree parameter. Information from the north coast modeling region will be used to help assign the level of weight to apply to the large tree parameter.

Oregon Slender Salamander:

- The Oregon slender salamander model was reviewed by Tiffany Garcia of Oregon State University (OSU). Key points of Tiffany's feedback include:
 - The parameters, suitability thresholds, and the weight assigned to the various parameters in the model seem appropriate.
 - Suggested changes to the large down wood metric to incorporate size, volume, and decay class.
 - Suggested increasing the suitability thresholds for large downed wood. This will help discern the habitat suitability more effectively.
 - Recommended building a model based on occurrences from the North Cascades range, with a few sampling sites within the Santiam Forest, and then applying it to the larger permit area. However, this is not a suggestion that would fit within the timeline for developing the HCP and it is likely that existing data and modeling provides a good prediction for Oregon slender salamander.
- Revisions being made to the Oregon slender salamander HCP model in response to this expert review include:
 - Increasing large downed wood suitability thresholds.
 - Including higher decay classes in the model.

Northern Spotted Owl:

- Key revisions that the ICF/ODF team have made to the northern spotted owl model based on ST input includes:
 - Canopy cover was found to not be a suitable parameter to predict habitat suitability for northern spotted owl. The team removed canopy cover from the model and left in other parameters that better characterize older, structurally complex forest conditions.
 - Weighted the trees per acre parameter more heavily in the model.
- Aaron reviewed tables that help explain why the canopy cover parameter skews predictions for northern spotted owl habitat suitability.

- The team compared the HCP model with the published Davis et. al. model. The results between the two models are generally consistent. There is sufficient overlap in habitat suitability predictions between the HCP northern spotted owl model and the Davis et. al. model. There does not seem to be a need to further refine the model or adjust parameters.
 - The ICF/ODF team will send out a packet that includes comparisons between the HCP model and the published model so that the ST can explore the details. The team can walk through the comparisons of the models with ST members offline as requested.
- At this point, the ICF/ODF team thinks the models seem to be sufficient as there is general overlap and consistency between the HCP models and published models and therefore does not need further edits at this time. If ST members have strong feelings about changes when they review the packet, there is still an opportunity to make some tweaks later. As we start to apply the models, if there is concern that the results don't reflect reality or are incongruous with published models, then we can see if any changes need to be made.

Marbled Murrelet:

- Key revisions made to the marbled murrelet model based on ST input include:
 - Merged the low suitability and suitable categories into a single "suitable" category. The habitat suitability thresholds set up in the model reflect existing data and seem to be appropriate; therefore, it makes sense to simply merge the two categories. The former "low suitability" category did not make sense biologically.
- Aaron showed tables that compared the former marbled murrelet tables with the revised tables that reflected the single "suitable" category.
- Aaron summarized the comparison between the published Raphael et. al. (2016) model and the HCP model. The alignment between the published model and HCP model is fairly reasonable. Further revisions to the HCP model would likely not be useful; the model appears fairly refined and appropriate as it is. Additionally, it does not seem useful to distinguish between suitable versus low suitability habitat for the species.
- ST members discussed the marbled murrelet model and provided the following questions and comments:
 - It may be useful to look at the relative differences between published models and the HCP model to help ST members understand how much variation there may be between the two models. We might want to make adjustments to the HCP model so that it more closely aligns with the published model.

- The Raphael et. al. (2016) model was modeled at a finer scale than the HCP model.
 - For example, if ODF has many NSO 70-acre cores designated, and if you were to apply the HCP NSO model to those 70-acre cores, how does the model categorize the 70-acre cores? The expectation would be that the model identifies those lands as highly suitable because they should represent potential nesting sites for owls. Similarly, for marbled murrelets, we would want to see how much overlap exists by comparing the Raphael et. al. (2016) model to the HCP model to compare Marbled Murrelet Management Areas (MMMAs).
 - The MMMAs can be compared to the HCP model and the Raphael et. al. (2016) model. The tables show how the HCP model reflects what is on the ground, though it may be helpful to remove the outliers. The highly suitable category identifies the best habitat for the species and then we will evaluate on a stand level.
 - It was clarified that ODF has relatively few 70-acre NSO cores designated but this is worth exploring. ODF biologists have completed a habitat assessment for owls. Suggestion to compare the model to the biologists' on-the-ground assessments as a way to check the accuracy of the models.

ST members noted it would be helpful to schedule a meeting to discuss modeling after the comparison information has been distributed. Troy reviewed the following topics for this meeting and encouraged the ST to let the project team know if members had other ideas to validate the models.

- Compare models to 70-acre NSO cores
- Compare models to an on-the-ground assessment
- Compare MMMAs to the ODF and published models

Deb asked the ST whether there is sufficient alignment on the models for the technical team to move forward with the modeling. ST members provided the following responses:

- It would be helpful to see some examples of how the model compares to what is occurring on the ground. Suggestion to provide a map that shows where the model predicts there to be habitat and the different levels of suitability.
- It would be beneficial to spend some time reviewing the model comparisons, but it seems like the models are moving in the right direction.
- Several members noted the models are on the right track. Some adjustments are needed for some models and a ground truthing component would be helpful.

- A member noted that the models are just one tool to develop the conservation strategies. There will be opportunities in the future to make updates and changes as needed.

HABITAT CONSERVATION AREAS

Troy explained the team has been systematically working to develop HCAs throughout the permit area. Today, we will review and discuss several example HCAs in the north coast. The HCA examples will show some of the nuances in delineating boundaries and will demonstrate how the landscape influences the HCAs. The size of HCAs will vary based on location within the permit area and will primarily be driven by land ownership patterns. The ST was encouraged to provide general feedback on the HCAs and the patterns observed. The ideas and comments provided today will help the project team further delineate the HCA boundaries.

Nick Palazzotto, ODF, presented the conceptual HCAs. He explained he will first provide a look at the landscape and then review a few example HCAs. Randy Smith, ODF, navigated GIS during the presentation. Key topics of the presentation include:

- Provided an overview of the HCP plan area. At the last meeting, the ST reviewed three examples of conceptual HCAs and saw how screening criteria was applied. The ST discussed how the goals and approaches vary by district or region based on species distribution, landscape context (the amount and configuration of ODF land ownership relative to other public and private ownership), and habitat variations.
- Generally, the intent is to start by building a functional landscape for owls, and then build functional landscape for the other terrestrial species starting with marbled murrelets.
- At any given district, a series of large and/or small HCAs is delineated by identifying all of the stands and areas that lend themselves well to HCAs. Generally, we are moving across the land and looking for old and complex habitat and incorporating those into the HCAs, while being mindful of connectivity. There may also be some strategies that apply to lands outside of HCAs for conservation purposes.

Nick reviewed various regions in the permit area and explained the HCA strategy for each area. Key points of the presentation include:

North Coast:

- The goal is to build a functional landscape in the north coast. In this part of the state, a diverse and functional forest is contingent on ODF because there aren't a lot of other forest lands owned by other entities on the north coast.
- The HCAs in the north coast are larger and more contiguous to accommodate multiple owl sites and to provide flow between those areas. The HCAs are also trying to consolidate and incorporate most of the MMMAs. The intent of the larger HCAs is to improve the quantity and quality of habitat for covered species.

- For red tree voles, we need to be mindful about connectivity because dispersal is one of the species' biggest issues.

West Oregon:

- In the 1980s, there was considerable harvest that occurred under the Forest Practices Act (FPA) in the West Oregon District. There are discrete mature patches in an otherwise young landscape that is surrounded by mid-size and large industrial landowners. The habitat outside of the federal lands is on ODF land. The ability to support owls in this landscape is limited, except where ODF lands connect with other federal lands. The stands are currently occupied by marbled murrelet and red tree voles.
- The strategy for this district includes targeting the mature forests to meet the objectives for species. There will be relatively discrete HCAs. The focus in this area will be to maintain and enhance flow for red tree voles.

Western Lane:

- The Western Lane District has scattered tracts that includes a large amount of federal land. This region has 45 active owl sites, which is a function of the adjacent federal lands.
- The intent is to support the flow between adjacent federal lands, achieve a larger functional landscape, protect the occupied sites, and be thoughtful about the scattered lands.

North Cascades:

- In the north Cascades, red tree vole and marbled murrelet populations decline; northern spotted owls and slender salamander are the focus in this area.
- The intent is to look at the larger functional landscape and consider the flow for species. In this region, the team is looking at flow between the Silver Falls Park, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, and national forest lands. The strategy focuses on historic and active owl sites; other strategies will be incorporated for Oregon slender salamander as needed.

Southwest Region:

- In the southwest region, there are lots of northern spotted owls and scattered tracts. This area also has coastal marten occupancy.

Coos Bay:

- In Coos Bay, the intent is to align the conservation areas with what is happening in the Elliott State Forest.

North Coast Example HCAs

Nick then presented examples of HCAs in the north coast. He provided a broad overview of the approach to drawing HCAs in the north coast and noted draft HCAs have been drawn for a vast majority of Tillamook and Astoria, and preliminary work is being done in Forest Grove. There is a framework of large HCAs coming into place in the north coast. The next step is to look at connectivity between the areas.

Nick presented a map showing active sites and abandoned sites for northern spotted owls and marbled murrelets. He explained the HCAs have incorporated all active owl sites, some abandoned owl sites of historic importance, and marbled murrelet active sites.

Example 1: God's Valley/Sweet Home HCA

Nick reviewed an example north coast HCA referred to as God's Valley or Sweet Home. Key topics of the presentation include:

- The area includes many red tree vole occurrences, occupied marbled murrelet areas, and many historic owl sites. The area has multiple pairs of birds that are well established and multiple nesting sites.
- The area is very large and conducive to habitat conservation. There are two terrestrial anchors under ODF's current management plan in the area.
- The HCA is drawn to incorporate areas of habitat and potential habitat, to provide connectivity of species, and to connect Forest Grove and Tillamook districts via the Salmonberry Corridor.
- Nick explained the various pieces of data and layers that were considered in drawing the HCA, including: age classes, LIDAR, thinning practices, planned harvest areas, inoperable areas, etc.
- The HCA may lend itself to some barred owl management techniques. It is also full of young stands, alder, and swiss needle cast. The ST will need to discuss what active management would be appropriate here.
- It would be beneficial to discuss whether the HCA should be this large, or whether it makes sense to break the HCA into several smaller HCAs.
 - The HCA is drawn large in order to best meet the biological goals and objectives for the species.
 - These larger HCAs may be the best places to reevaluate if timber harvest targets are being met.
- This is an area where the MMMAs are lining up on the landscape already. Over the course of the HCP permit term, the areas between the MMMAs could fill in and create connectivity between the MMMAs.

ST members discussed the God's Valley/Sweet Home HCA and provided the following comments:

- It looks like there is north to south connectivity in the draft HCA, but there does not seem to be much east to west connectivity.
 - Nick explained how east to west connectivity was considered and noted there are three major east west corridors.

Example 2: Clatsop Area HCA

Nick reviewed another example north coast HCA in the Clatsop area. Key topics of the presentation include:

- There is little red tree vole occurrence data in this area and little habitat for northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet.
- This is a fragmented, complex landscape and an active part of the landscape with lots of harvest. Nick reviewed the areas that have been harvested, thinned, or will be harvested and noted some of the area is already identified for harvest before the HCP permit term would begin.
- The team asked the ST for input on how best to manage this area as there are multiple constraints.

The ST members discussed the Clatsop Area HCA and provided the following comments:

- Suggested blocking up the area a little bit more but there is also a need to balance it with the entire forest. Supported larger HCAs to reduce fragmentation.
- Consider prioritizing and capturing as much of the older existing forest as possible.
- Suggestion to include the northwest portion of the landscape in the HCA as there are stands over 80 years old.
 - A member noted the habitat has very low suitability but can be included in future development to improve habitat suitability.
- The boundaries of this HCA depend on what management actions will occur in HCAs.

AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES IN HABITAT CONSERVATION AREAS

Troy framed the discussion on determining the activities authorized in HCAs. He explained the activities inside an HCA will inform and change how the HCAs are drawn. Larger HCAs could accommodate more management tools than smaller HCAs; therefore, there will be variability in management actions across HCAs. Troy suggested developing a full suite of management activities and techniques. There will be cases where all types of management activities will be needed and other cases where little to no management is appropriate. All management

activities would be completed with the goal of long-term habitat improvement in mind. The HCP itself can explain when, how, and why different techniques are applied in different HCAs.

Nick noted that the biological goals and objectives drive the activities in the HCAs. The management actions will be focused on protecting suitable habitat and managing habitat that is unsuitable. Revenue will not drive a decision. Variable density, harvest, thinning, timing, and measuring short-term impact are topics that will need to be discussed.

ST members discussed the management activities inside HCAs and provided the following comments and questions:

- Members agreed that management actions inside HCAs should be aimed at improving habitat and that timber harvest goals should not drive management activities in HCAs.
- It would be beneficial for ODF to commit to wide scale conservation measures such as no harvest of old growth trees, which would greatly benefit northern spotted owls and marbled murrelet.
- Suggestion to clarify what areas are managed for older forest species.
- There is a need to be mindful toward functional landscape and include legacy trees, stands, and downed wood that are outside of the HCA.
- An HCA can be as small as a single stand. To retain patches and legacy trees in harvesting units would be included as a specific conservation action.
- It is important to connect the terrestrial strategy with the aquatic and riparian buffer strategy. We need to look at where the harvest happens and how it relates to other covered species that are not benefiting from the HCAs.
- Consider road use activities and recreational impacts and how that would be addressed in the HCP.
- The forest's resiliency to fire will need to be addressed at a later time.
- Members agreed with the proposed approach to develop a large suite of management activities that will be used differently according to HCA size, location, and need.

The ST then discussed the process and approach for developing the HCAs and authorized activities inside HCAs moving forward. It was noted that separate discussions outside of ST meetings will be important to keep on track. ST members agreed to have separate, off-line conversations to develop the HCAs in more detail and discuss the authorized activities inside HCAs. Updates on the HCA developments and boundaries will be reviewed and discussed as a group at future ST meetings.

CONFIRM TOPICS FOR STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE

Troy reviewed the agenda topics for the SC meeting on March 31. He explained the meeting will include a discussion on the aquatic conservation strategy, discussion on the terrestrial strategy and the conceptual HCAs, updates on HCP project progress and timeline, and updates on the NEPA process. Members were comfortable with the project team presenting these topics to the SC and offered no additional agenda items.

Sylvia reminded ST members to connect with the SC members to provide updates on the ST progress to date so the SC is prepared to discuss the topics during the meeting.

APPROACH GOING FORWARD, NEXT STEPS, AND SUMMARY

Sylvia thanked members for their participation.

The next ST meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7 and will be aquatic focused.

The next meeting open to the public is scheduled for Monday, March 30 from 1-4 by webinar. ST members were encouraged to attend.

ACTION ITEMS

The following action items were identified throughout the meeting:

- ICF/ODF: Send out a packet that includes comparisons between the HCP model and the published model so that the ST can explore the details.
- ICF/ODF: Schedule a meeting to discuss modeling after the comparison information has been distributed and reviewed by the ST.
- ICF/ODF: Schedule additional, off-line discussions with ST members to further develop the HCAs in more detail and discuss authorized activities within the HCAs.