

MEETING SUMMARY

WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP SCOPING TEAM

Tuesday, June 23, 2020, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

By Webinar/Video Conference

ATTENDEES

Participants: Nick Palazzotto (ODF), Rich Szlemp (USFWS), Rod Krahmer (ODFW), Jim Muck (NOAA Fisheries), Tere O'Rourke (NOAA Fisheries), Josh Seeds (DSL), Brian Pew (ODF), Mike Wilson (ODF), Julie Firman (ODFW)

Technical Consultant and Guests: Troy Rahmig (ICF), 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, 2) Temperature protection zone (TPZ) update, 3) Timber harvest modeling, 4) Conservation strategy, 5) Barred owl control, 6) Monitoring program, 7) Confirm topics for Steering Committee (SC) update, and 8) Approach going forward, next steps, and summary.

Deb and Cindy Kolomechuk, ODF, noted that we are in a critical time for development of the Western Oregon HCP. Scoping Team (ST) members are expected to devote substantial time to review and discuss the chapters.

AGENCY UPDATES

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

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF): 1) Budget cuts are not planned for the State Forests Division since it is funded by timber sales. 2) The Senate Committee did not meet to approve new Board of Forestry (BOF) nominees, so the BOF will not be getting new members at this time. 3) In response to COVID-19, it is expected that agency staff will be working from home through at least the end of August. 4) Fire season is coming up and the agency has identified some staff that will not be helping with fire season in order to devote those key staff to the

Western Oregon HCP. Otherwise, most agency staff have some role to play in supporting fire season work. 5) The agency is doing a revamped comparative analysis to present to the BOF in October. The ST will get an update on key elements of the analysis but will not be expected to discuss or provide input into the analysis.

NOAA Fisheries: The agency is beginning to experience some budget cuts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and may be moving into limited hiring.

TEMPERATURE PROTECTION ZONE UPDATE

Troy Rahmig, ICF, provided an update on the TPZ, which is the perennial area upstream of fish-bearing streams. We have been waiting on the timber and habitat modeling to help inform the buffer strategy in the TPZ. The modeling is showing that wood recruitment does not change much regardless of the buffer width in the TPZ. For timber harvest modeling, there is some volume difference depending on the buffer width, but the difference is relatively small.

Troy noted that the intent is to share the details of the riparian strategy, including the numbers on the TPZ and other buffer details, at the June 25 SC meeting and with the public and the BOF in July.

Discussion:

ST members discussed the TPZ and provided the following questions and comments. Troy encouraged members to highlight any concerns before the TPZ is presented to the SC, the public, and the BOF.

- NOAA Fisheries noted the agency was comfortable with the proposed approach to the TPZ as the TerrainWorks modeling shows that there is a sufficient supply of wood under this approach.
- Members discussed how and whether beaver management would be included in the HCP. It was clarified that the HCP will not preclude beaver management in the future, but beaver management would not be listed as a specific conservation action in the HCP. Members made the following comments and considerations:
 - Members expressed interest in exploring beaver management further.
 - Beaver management continues to be a major discussion topic at Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Fish & Wildlife Commission, so it seems important to consider.
 - ODF clarified that the agency recognizes that beaver management can provide benefits but ODF is proposing not to include it in the HCP strategy and instead will consider it in the future. The intent is not to rely on beaver management as a conservation strategy to meet the biological goals and objectives under the HCP. Additionally, beaver management is a conversation that needs more discussion, and the HCP needs to move forward.

- Suggestion for Julie Firman, ODFW to develop a summary of habitat surveys to help the ST identify the best beaver habitat. There are likely proposals for beaver management in state forests that might be more effective than what is being proposed at the Fish & Wildlife Commission currently. Alder conversion could also be considered in conjunction with beaver management.
 - Suggestion for NOAA Fisheries and ODFW to coordinate and review beaver data, and if appropriate circle back to the ST and consider how to incorporate it into the HCP.
 - NOAA Fisheries and ODFW were encouraged to look at the HCP chapters, consider whether there is anything in the narrative that seems to preclude effective beaver management.
- Is there a difference in the type of management that occurs in the TPZ buffer as compared to other types of buffers?
 - All buffers receive the same management and are treated the same, with the exception of the Equipment Restriction Zone.
- Josh Seeds, Department of State Lands (DSL), mentioned he had some additional resources that might be helpful to add to the TPZ narrative, as well as some comments on the rationale.
 - Troy asked that Josh send his comments and resources as a reply all to the ST and the project team can incorporate the comments as needed.
 - Brian Pew, ODF, mentioned he would be happy to meet one-on-one to discuss. Cindy will set up the meeting.

TIMBER HARVEST MODELING UPDATE

Troy, Brian, and Mike Wilson, ODF, provided an update on the timber harvest modeling update. Key points of the presentation included:

- Update on how the modeling relates to drawing the Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs). ODF is updating the timber harvest model and the prescriptions with the aim to improve the model to better achieve the forest goals and objectives. The HCAs are also being right sized so that they meet the biological goals and objectives within the HCP while also being in line with mandates under Greatest Permanent Value (GPV). District staff and biologists have also been engaged to better revise the HCP boundaries. The HCA boundaries have also been compared with occurrence data and existing and future habitat to ensure that the best potential habitat is contained within the HCAs, without keeping the HCAs so expansive that they cannot meet other agency goals. The HCAs will need to be both socially and economically acceptable.

- There are some scattered parcels in southern Oregon, which leads to smaller and non-contiguous HCAs in that area as compared to the larger HCAs in the north coast forests.
- Provided information on the proportion of the landscape that the HCAs might make up.
- In July, there will be a meeting open to the public and a BOF meeting. We plan to share an overview of what the HCAs could look like and will present the information as a range. We would also provide an overview of the type of management activities that could occur inside the HCAs and explain that management is intended to benefit the species.

Discussion:

ST members discussed the timber harvest modeling and the HCAs and provided the following questions and comments:

- Have we settled on the management prescriptions within HCAs?
 - No, we have talked about a range of prescriptions but are waiting on the model results to show pace and scale. After we receive the modeling results, we will have a discussion with the ST on whether the prescriptions lead to appropriate benefits for the species.
 - Interest in further discussion on silvicultural prescriptions both inside and outside the HCAs soon. This is really what influences the amount of habitat across the landscape, regardless of how many acres are in the Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) and the HCAs.
 - Will the ST be able to see the management assumptions in the modeling?
 - Yes, once we have a model run that works, the management assumptions will be made available.
- As we refine the HCAs, we are looking at optimizing the landscape. In the first model run, there were some larger areas within HCAs that were not biologically significant, and it may not make sense to keep those in the HCA boundaries. Even outside of the HCAs, there will be areas that are not operated on because they are inoperable areas or for other reasons.
- Members discussed the balancing that the BOF will need to do between meeting biological goals and objectives as well as the social and economic goals. The ST requested further details on how the BOF is planning to consider this balance.
 - It was clarified that the BOF has provided overarching direction on meeting the GPV mandate of balancing social and economic benefits with biological benefits. This is a policy guidance by the BOF, but it is not a final decision.

- It will be important to be clear about why a certain social and economic objective or target is being proposed. These objectives should ideally be quantifiable and measurable, so that they can be reasonably compared to the biological goals and objectives that are quantifiable and measurable.
 - Suggestion to develop a written description to explain how the decision is being made to balance GPVs with the biological goals and objectives. ODF noted that we do not have explicit analyses on meeting social and economic goals, as it is a policy decision and will consider ways to explain this in the future.
- ODF clarified that the FMP is the appropriate place to dive more deeply into the social and economic objectives. The HCP is focused on biological goals and objectives, and only addresses social and economic objectives within the HCP as it relates to funding because the HCP needs to be economically viable.
 - A member noted that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will evaluate the economic and social objectives.
- ST members discussed the presentation of the HCAs at the July meeting open to the public and BOF meeting.
 - It is appropriate to provide general information on the type of management actions that might occur within the HCAs, with the caveat that the ST has not come to any final recommendations on the management actions.
 - Members discussed messaging around the range of lands that could be included within the HCAs and noted that the ST still needs significant additional discussion on the appropriate amount of lands to include in HCAs.
 - It is important to characterize the range as a “work in progress” and be clear that things will change because we are still learning new information and working details out.

CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Troy presented on a few actions within the conservation strategy. Key topics of the presentation included:

- **Management activities outside of HCAs:** This includes how harvest will occur outside of HCAs, and what kind of conservation will be built into those actions. This shows up as conservation action #8 in the HCP chapter. A proposal for what management activities outside of HCAs could look like includes:

- Outside of the HCAs there is a commitment to maintaining dispersal habitat for northern spotted owl. The goal is to retain a certain amount of the landscape in dispersal habitat over time.
- Legacy structures on the landscape will be retained. The size of regeneration harvest will be limited, as dictated by the Forest Practices Act (FPA), and there will be a requirement around the distance between regeneration harvests. It will also be important to consider how to treat leave trees, snag retention, and downed wood outside of HCAs.
- Priorities for leave trees: The conservation action can put terms on timber sales, to require the operator to leave priority trees. The team proposes prioritizing leaving trees that could be beneficial to the species (i.e., trees older than 120 years, trees with key habitat features, poorly formed trees, and trees that are adjacent to the RCAs). This list of considerations is open for discussion by the ST.
- Snag retention: Propose focusing on snag retention as a way to retain key habitat features on the landscape for the species. Snag retention shows up in the FMP, but there is value in including it in the HCP as well to help with minimization.
- Downed wood: The intent is that during harvest activities, a certain amount of existing down logs would be retained. Additionally, there will be other activities to retain downed wood.
- **Barred owl management:**
 - The HCP includes a conservation action dedicated to barred owl management. ODF is continuing to develop this with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The intent is to have ODF fund barred owl management at some level. Any barred owl actions in the future would need to be coordinated with USFWS. Barred owl management is a regional effort and not a single landowner effort, which is why the approach of ODF providing funding seems to be the best approach. It will be important that the funds be spent on barred owl management within the HCP permit term or the permit area.
 - Most barred owl management activities would likely occur in the north coast areas. Funding would come as a percentage of timber activities. The HCP commitment would include a specific dollar amount/cap for the funding, as well as a temporal component. Barred owl management would likely occur over the first few decades of the permit term to provide for long term benefits.
 - After ODF reviews the barred owl management chapter, the team will share it with USFWS to ensure it is consistent with that agency's expectations and preferences.

Discussion:

ST members discussed management activities outside of HCAs and barred owl management and provided the following questions and comments:

- Will ecological forestry be applied outside of HCAs? Is the intent that current timber harvest practices will be continued outside of HCAs?
 - Prescriptions outside of HCAs will likely be more traditional. The intent is that current timber harvest practices will continue, such as commercial thinning and clear-cut strategies, but there will likely be some differences such as more multi-species plantings, different retention requirements that are higher than the current FPA, changes in rotation age, and some other differences.
 - Can you clarify the silvicultural prescriptions outside of HCAs?
 - We are looking to have age class distribution that is relatively even. The intent is to have some older stands on the landscape that would be rotated through. Some older timber would be grown and harvested within the general rotation. The silvicultural prescriptions being modeled right now are much simpler than what we might do in practice. We are trying to include enough on the silvicultural prescriptions to do modeling so that the BOF can make a decision in October, but they are not incredibly specific.
- Suggestion to consider the best way to do snag retention and downed wood for Oregon slender salamander.
- ST members discussed leave tree priorities:
 - Suggestion to not prioritize trees adjacent to RCAs in the list of leave tree priorities. The RCA buffers do a good job of protecting the species.
 - Is the intent that leave trees would be left indefinitely?
 - In practice, yes. Whenever a stand is harvested, the same trees would likely be left throughout multiple harvests, as long as those trees continue to meet the leave tree priorities.
 - Suggestion to clarify in the HCP that the trees would be left indefinitely over the term of the HCP as well as clarify that the intent is to keep the same valuable trees to let them grow as legacy trees through multiple rotations.
 - It is important to prioritize leaving trees with key habitat features and have leave trees spread across the landscape in a meaningful way.
 - Suggestion to provide more specificity around the number of leave trees that should be left.

- We can have some targets but want to leave some flexibility and not make it a strict requirement.
 - It may be difficult to keep track of leave trees as timber harvest unit boundaries change. Consider how to track leave trees.
 - The companion FMP will begin to be developed in October. A lot more discussion on leave tree priorities will occur during that FMP development.
- ST members discussed barred owl management:
 - USFWS is doing some research on barred owls and it is expected that some barred owl management recommendations will be forthcoming, however the timing is unclear. It is likely that barred owl removal will still be a recommended strategy.
 - It was clarified that Chapter 4 of the HCP will be sent to the ST for review in late July. The team can provide the narrative on barred owl conservation action to the ST in advance of the full chapter.
 - It was clarified that the dollar amount of the suggested funding is still being determined and the team is open to ST ideas. There is limited information and data to help determine an appropriate dollar amount.
 - Suggestion for ODF to discuss internally about a range of costs. Recommend not including a specific dollar amount in the HCP, and instead leaving that for implementation.

TERRESTRIAL MONITORING PROGRAM

Troy presented on the conceptual ideas of the terrestrial monitoring program. Key topics of the presentation included:

- The approach to the terrestrial monitoring program includes three parts: 1) compliance monitoring, 2) effectiveness monitoring, and 3) species monitoring.
- **Compliance monitoring** includes tools to document that compliance with the HCP is occurring. This will include tracking harvest actions in the HCAs on an annual basis and comparing what was planned for and what actually occurred in the HCAs. This will also include a report on the ability of timber harvest activities to adhere to the various conservation actions.
 - There would likely be some sale close out process after each harvest and would all be summarized in annual reports. The report would include a summary of harvest actions in HCAs, any sales that were unable to meet conservation actions, and what was done in response.

- **Effectiveness monitoring** will report out on the changes in modeled habitat quality over time and show how effective the HCP actions are at reaching the biological goals and objectives. This would be reported out in five-year intervals and include information on how things have changed compared to the baseline and since the last reporting period.
 - The intent is to track habitat loss and growth during implementation and monitor whether we are meeting the northern spotted owl 40% threshold.
- **Monitoring for the species:** The monitoring program will include some monitoring for the species as well.
 - For northern spotted owl, there may be some activity center monitoring through field surveys and bio-acoustic monitoring. Also, we propose that later in the permit term, there be some habitat validation monitoring to see if owls are moving into new parts of the forest.
 - Would have similar type of monitoring for the other terrestrial species as well.

Discussion:

ST members discussed the terrestrial monitoring program and provided the following questions and comments:

Deb went around the virtual table to see if ST members supported the proposed approach. Key comments included:

- Supported the approach for northern spotted owl and marble murrelet. Would be interested in seeing what kind of monitoring is envisioned for Oregon slender salamander.
- A member noted the approach is a good starting point but would like to see more detail and specificity. Because of the lack of awareness of where there is red tree vole and Oregon slender salamander on the landscape, we may need to consider how to build that into the monitoring.
 - For Oregon slender salamander, red tree vole, and coastal marten, there is less clarity on what should be monitored and what we should look for. Instead, monitoring for those species would be more about learning where those species are on the landscape. We would monitor/investigate where the species exists so we are sampling and surveying in the right places. This may be done in partnership with other organizations so that ODF can play a role in those larger research efforts.
 - The HCP chapter will also provide more detail and information.
- Is there a commitment to barred owl monitoring?
 - There will likely be monitoring built into the barred owl management program, but if we need to use a different approach, we will need to discuss this as a ST.

- It would be helpful to see some study of the interaction between northern spotted owls and barred owls.
- It is important to monitor barred owls to help us understand changes in habitat quality.
- ODF may also consider some broader monitoring outside of the HCP to incorporate some actions coming out of the regional carnivore working group.
- Reminder that under the HCP, there would be no pre-timber surveys. Instead, funds would be used to better understand the species and the habitat changes over time. It will be important that we do monitoring in a way that provides meaningful information, but that is not unnecessarily burdensome or expensive.

Troy noted that the team will provide more details on the HCP monitoring chapter for the ST to review around mid-July.

CONFIRM TOPICS FOR STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The next SC meeting is scheduled for June 25. During the SC meeting, the intent is to present the TPZ proposal, a summary of the wood recruitment modeling, an update on the timber harvest modeling process, and an overview of what will be presented at the meeting open to the public and the BOF meeting.

ST members provided the following comments and suggestions regarding the SC meeting topics:

- A member noted it would be helpful to hear from the SC whether they feel we are ready to present information on the HCAs to the public and BOF.
- Suggestion to discuss justification for the social and economic objectives.
- During the meeting open to the public, it may be useful to review the definitions of horizontal and slope distance before discussing the conservation strategy.

Deb encouraged ST members to check in with their SC counterparts before Thursday to discuss and provide any updates on the development of the HCP.

APPROACH GOING FORWARD, NEXT STEPS, AND SUMMARY

Deb thanked ST members for their participation. The next ST meeting is scheduled for July 7. The next meeting open to the public meeting is scheduled for July 13.

ACTION ITEMS

The following action items were identified throughout the meeting:

- NOAA Fisheries and ODFW: Coordinate and review beaver data. Look at the HCP chapters, consider whether there is anything in the narrative that seems to preclude effective beaver management.
- Josh: Send his comments and resources on the TPZ to the ST for review.
- Cindy: Schedule a meeting with Brian Pew, ODF, and Josh Seeds, DSL, to discuss the TPZ.
- Project team: Provide the ST further details on how the BOF plans to consider the balance of the HCP so it meets the biological goals and objectives as well as the social and economic goals.
- ST: Check in with their SC counterparts before Thursday's SC meeting to provide updates on the HCP.