

Background and Key Points on Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

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The Oregon Board of Forestry will vote on October 6 on whether to move forward to a federal NEPA process by submitting a proposed Western Oregon State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan (SFHCP) to NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS. This will cover the Tillamook and Clatsop state forests -- which together stretch across 500,000 acres in Northwest Oregon. This document provides some background on the decision and suggested messaging as part of an effort to support a “yes” vote at the October 6 meeting. You can see all the lands that [fall under this HCP here](#).

There is a ton of detailed information at these links:

[Oregon Department of Forestry webpage on SFHCP](#)

[Map of all forests covered by this plan](#)

[Maps of proposed Habitat Conservation Areas \(HCAs\)](#)

What is this all about?

State forests are managed for a broad goal of “greatest permanent value” to the state.

Historically, timber harvest has dominated management of state forests, as the timber industry (who gets logs) and county officials (who get county revenue and campaign donations) press for timber production as the dominant goal. Further, ODF pays their whole state forest staff budget from harvest revenues, so ODF has an interest in putting logging revenues first.

However, Oregon continues to grow and change politically, the state forests see more recreation every year, and forest conservation is increasingly recognized as a key piece of solving the climate crisis. In addition, there are endangered species on the state forests that ODF is required to protect under federal law. Currently ODF spends \$2.5 million per year surveying for endangered species to avoid harming them. The Board of Forestry is now considering a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that prioritizes high-quality habitat areas for conservation management while allowing timber harvest to continue to be the top goal outside of these areas.

Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP)

HCPs are deals between landowners (including states) and the federal government. A landowner develops a plan to conserve habitat for rare species, and in return they get an “incidental take permit” which is essentially some legal protection against lawsuits if the landowner does harm rare species in the course of following the plan. Constant surveys for rare species cease with an HCP. The landowner gets security to manage and the conservation commitments are made more durable. The specific terms of each HCP vary as to the habitat protections required and the plan’s duration. HCPs are used across the nation and come from plans for a single parcel for one species to massive landscape plans with multiple species (like this one).

This HCP

The proposed State Forest HCP (SFHCP) commits approximately 50% of the state forest land to long-term conservation, composed of 43% in Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs) (including riparian areas within HCAs) and another 7% for riparian protection areas outside the HCAs. Areas inside the HCAs will be managed with a primary purpose of habitat conservation, not timber harvest. Areas outside the HCAs will be subject to the kind of harvest practices ODF now employs, including clearcutting on approximately a 60-80 year rotation (more details forthcoming from ODF). The commitments in the SFHCP are for 70 years.

How is this HCP different than the current plan?

In some ways the SFHCP is not so different from [the current plan \(warning 581 pages\)](#), which also reserves around 50% of the forest for non-timber values. But there are a couple of key differences.

- 1) The HCAs are a long-term commitment for 70 years. Under the current plan, conservation commitments can be changed and moved around the state forest with a simple signature from the State Forester and no public process or scientific analysis. In contrast, the more durable HCAs are 70 year commitments that are made with a public process and that will not migrate around the landscape to meet harvest goals.
- 2) HCAs will be managed for conservation. Today, ODF often harvests aggressively in conservation areas, with little analysis and for the goal of timber production. The SFHCP would make the conservation of the HCA the overriding goal, and timber harvest for revenue would not drive actions. Much is to be fleshed out on harvest strategies in the HCAs in the SFHCP.

Are there any conservation negatives from the plan?

The plan is clearly a compromise. Half of the acres of the Western Oregon State Forests will be open to industrial-style clearcutting, including pesticide spraying from helicopters when re-establishing new stands. There will be patches of older forest (70+) years that will be clearcut (we need to learn how many acres). But older forest clearcuts and pesticide spray are already common under the current plan. The SFHCP is a compromise between long-term conservation and pressure for timber and revenue for local taxing districts.

Strong Opposition

Lining up strongly against the plan are mill owners like Hampton and Stimson, who are top log purchasers from state forests, as well rural county commissioners, especially from Tillamook County. The Oregon Forestry Industries Council, Association of Oregon Loggers, and Timber Unity are likely to be on record against the plan at the Board of Forestry meeting.

Key Take Home Thoughts

--Wild Salmon Center strongly support moving ahead with the State Forest Habitat Conservation Plan (SFHCP)

--The SFHCP is a compromise that balances timber harvest with fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and clean water.

- Approximately 50% of the Tillamook and Clatsop forests will be designated for conservation. The designations support endangered species recovery, including coho salmon and marbled murrelet (with goal of eventual delisting).
- The SFHCP is fairly similar to current plan, but provides more long term certainty by designating conservation and timber harvest areas that the state would be obligated to follow for the next 70 years.
- The SFHCP provides significant conservation in important salmon and steelhead strongholds: the Wilson, Salmonberry, Nehalem, Miami, Trask, and Kilchis Rivers. Lands adjacent to the 17-mile Nehalem State Scenic Waterway corridor will get increased protections under this plan.
- There has been an extensive public process to this point and will be more going forward -- the earliest the SFHCP would go into effect would be 24 months, with more votes and process by the Board of Forestry ahead.
- The plan frees up resources for the state, conservationists, and timber operators to focus on management instead of conflict. The state currently spends \$2.5 million to survey and avoid endangered species habitat.
- The proposed plan protects 50% of one of Oregon's most important forests for carbon absorption and climate change mitigation.