State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

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MEMORANDUM

To: **Forest Practices Board**

From: **David Whipple, Forest Policy Coordinator** DW

SUBJECT: **UPLAND WILDLIFE PLANNING UPDATE**

Because it has been a while since the Forest Practices Board (Board) was last updated on the status of the Wildlife Work Plan, I'll briefly summarize the work plan and provide an update on each element. The Wildlife Work Plan was endorsed by the Board in March of 2003. The work plan has four elements:

1. Assessment of Current Rules Intended to Protect Wildlife
2. Landscape-level Wildlife Assessment
3. Implementation Mechanisms and Incentives for Wildlife Habitat Management
4. Adaptive Management

Assessment of Current Rules Intended to Protect Wildlife

This element includes an analysis on how target wildlife species and requisite habitats are faring under rule implementation, as well as a similar assessment for wildlife species not covered under current rules. Species intended to be assessed include the species for which there is a Critical Wildlife Habitat (State) rule under WAC 222-16-080(1); these include Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Bald Eagle and a number of additional forest species. The Department of Fish and Wildlife was asked to take the lead on organizing the scientific analyses with stakeholder involvement.

Background

Rules for the Northern Spotted Owl were the first to be assessed, which entailed much work by many stakeholders over the years. These efforts included: a Spotted Owl Policy Group formed in 2004 to discuss issues relative to owl protection and conservation; a WDFW-conducted assessment and briefing report that was submitted to the Board in August 2005; an assessment of Spotted Owl habitat on non-federal lands in Washington conducted by WDFW with funding

assistance from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR); a DNR operational review of how Forest Practices Applications relative to owl habitat are processed throughout the owl's range in Washington; numerous emergency rules and a permanent rule on owl site decertification; a Board-appointed Northern Spotted Owl Policy Working Group, which produced a report in 2009; and, a 2010 Board-appointed Northern Spotted Owl Implementation Team. In addition, a Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl was released for public comment, and in response the state agencies and stakeholders provided written comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Update

The 2010 Board-appointed Northern Spotted Owl Implementation Team continues to work on implementing the consensus recommendations from the Northern Spotted Owl Policy Working Group, coordinating with the USFWS relative to Barred Owl control experiments, and convening a technical team to assess spatial and temporal allocation of conservation efforts on nonfederal lands using best available science. The Implementation Team is following Board direction to think broadly and consider new paradigms, and working on providing meaningful incentives for landowners to provide Spotted Owl habitat where it is needed and to voluntarily assist with other conservation efforts. More information on the status of the Implementation Team's actions, activities and progress will be provided under a separate Board meeting agenda item.

Discussions over the past year or so have recognized that work on Spotted Owl protection and conservation remains the focus of involved caucuses. Because of this, and depending on staff resources of the agencies and stakeholders, it may be possible to conduct assessments on a few species that are lower on the rule assessment priority list. These species include the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and Gray Wolf. Preliminary stakeholder discussion indicates that the rules for these species could be assessed and any necessary work could be accomplished relatively quickly. This was due to the fact that the eagle and falcon are no longer state or federally listed.

Relative to the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, WDFW anticipates having stakeholder discussions regarding possible changes to the Forest Practices Rules once the agency has concluded discussions internally and with the USFWS on how Bald Eagles may be protected and conserved in Washington under provisions of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. For efficiency purposes, discussions and any rule changes for both species could be conducted simultaneously.

WDFW is developing a wolf conservation and management plan that will guide management of the species once it's federally de-listed. The Fish and Wildlife Commission is expected to make a decision on the management plan in late 2011. After these processes conclude, WDFW intends to work with stakeholders to discuss any modifications to the existing Forest Practices Rule for this species.

Landscape-level Wildlife Assessment

This will be a comprehensive look at how all forest practice rules, combined with other measures such as HCPs and federal land management, contribute to forest wildlife habitat in the state. This scientific assessment will rely heavily on habitat modeling and GIS spatial analysis.

Update
As I have reported previously, while this project accomplished a great deal and was close to having generated deliverables for the Board, it has been moth-balled due to a lack of funding. Recognizing the ongoing state budget situation, WDFW continues to pursue possible outside funding avenues that could enable completion of the project, such as partnerships with research entities.

Implementation Mechanisms and Incentives for Wildlife Habitat Management
This element is an analysis of how to most effectively achieve wildlife protection while maintaining a viable forest products industry. It will include analysis of why landscape planning options are not currently being utilized and evaluation of incentive mechanisms to make wildlife protection measures more affordable and desirable to landowners.

Update
This work plan element is being conducted within the context of Spotted Owl conservation and management by the Northern Spotted Owl Implementation Team.

Beyond these efforts, work is ongoing related to ESHB 2541 of the 2010 legislative session (Promoting the economic success of the forest products industry). This bill requires DNR to develop landowner conservation proposals that support forest landowners by December 31, 2011. In the development of the proposals, DNR must consult with the Board, Native American tribes, small forest landowners, conservation groups, industrial foresters, and state, federal, and local governments. The proposed initiatives, if any, must be presented to the Governor, the Legislature, the Commission of Public Lands, and the Board. The DNR must also offer to present its findings to the Washington congressional delegation, local governments, and appropriate agencies of the federal government.

Additional forest landowner incentives are being explored by the Forest Carbon Work Group. The purpose of the work group is to provide the forum for stakeholders and government representatives to develop recommendations to the Departments of Ecology and Natural Resources to address the intent of Executive Order 09-05, and to partially address the intent of ESHB 2541. The starting point for this work is the 2008 work group final report.

Adaptive Management
This element will address how to build a comprehensive adaptive management program for all wildlife resource objectives of the forest practices rules. In additional to developing a scientific framework for monitoring species objectives, it will also address institutional and funding issues.

Update
This work plan element has not been addressed directly. Adequately funding a healthy and comprehensive adaptive management program will likely be a significant hurdle. Therefore, it may be more desirable to focus adaptive management efforts on individual species and habitats, particularly if and when Forest Practices Rules are modified in such a way that will provide direction for targeted adaptive management work.