

**POLICY WORKING GROUP
WASHINGTON STATE NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL**

**REPORT to the FOREST PRACTICES BOARD
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This is the first report on the Forest Practice Board's Policy Working Group. Members include four representatives from the forest products industry, four from conservation organizations, three from state agencies, one from USFWS and one from the Association of Counties. Additional Policy Group member slots not yet filled are two positions reserved for tribal governments and one for a land conservancy or trust.

The Policy Working Group held two meetings in January 2009. Members thoroughly discussed its Charter from the Forest Practices Board (FPB), in particular the duty to base its work on best available science and focus on voluntary, incentive-based measures while acknowledging that the Board's rules may need to be modified.

The Policy Group is approaching their tasks not as a negotiating group, but as a creative design and collaborative problem solving team. This is not easy, as the parties do not have a strong recent history of collaboration. The members agree they must have a common understanding of the issues, the science, and what remaining questions require research. At that point, the task is to work together to forge incentive packages that address the interests of private landowners and the public. Policy Group work products must both protect the owl and help preserve the forest products industry in Washington.

The members shared information and discussed the Federal Recovery Plan litigation, FPB Interim Rules, available science, and landowners concerns. Discussion focused on what problems the Policy Group are charged with solving, and what can practically be done to solve them.

Based upon their charter, existing knowledge, and the interests described by each group member, members individually proposed 2-6 deliverables, or tasks the Policy Group could accomplish, that he or she believed were doable in the short and long range. The consolidated list of proposed tasks is a first draft, collective sense of approach for review and further consideration. In general, the tasks focus on what can be accomplished in one year, how to preserve options for owl conservation during the year's work, and development of a long term set of incentives, with quantifiable objectives, that can assist species conservation and sustain landowners.

Policy Group members agreed in principle to serve as the Non-Federal Landowners Workgroup in the Federal process to avoid duplication, assure coordination across levels of government, and reduce overall costs. The Policy Group joined the Federal NSO Recovery Process' Executive Group meeting in Portland on January 28 to further understand what would be involved from the Federal perspective, and assess the opportunities and requirements to address both the Washington Forest Practice Board and the US Fish and Wildlife Service needs. The Policy Group will continue to coordinate

with Federal activities and research related to spotted owl conservation in order to pool knowledge and minimize overlap and costs. Chuck Turley as a Policy Group member from DNR, also serves on the NSO Implementation Team and thus will provide an ongoing bridge between the state and federal work groups and to help the group avoid doubling up on the analysis or rehashing work already done.

In part as an early test of its ability to act collaboratively, the Policy Group considered supporting proposed state legislation. The group does not want to get side tracked from its focus on developing effective ways to correct current landowner disincentives to protect endangered species on their property, but agreed that it would like to send a message that the Policy Group is working collectively to address a variety of public and private interests related to northern spotted owl conservation. The group agreed to develop a joint letter to the legislature regarding HB 1484 and SB 5401, which create a habitat open space program to facilitate strategic acquisitions of Northern Spotted Owl and other endangered species habitat located on private lands. The group may also choose to comment on related issues.

Policy Group members discussed specific questions with which to focus technical briefings over the next few meetings, to both build a common information base and move the Policy Group towards its goals. It was agreed that two subgroups would prepare briefing proposals for consideration on February 3.

The first subgroup composed of State and Federal representatives will focus its proposed briefing package on the question: **Where can incentives most usefully be applied?** This would involve data and science regarding where the species are present and what might be the optimal size and spacing of reserves. Subgroup members will prepare a proposed briefing package designed to inform Policy Group decisions on where it might focus its application of incentives and associated regulatory improvements for northern spotted owl conservation.

The second subgroup composed of forest products industry and landowner group members will present a proposal for series of briefings on the economics of forest management focused on the question: **What factors will affect the success of incentives?**

Meeting dates through June 2009 were established. These dates are preliminary and due to attendance issues some of the dates may be converted to subgroup meetings. The dates reserved are: January 28; February 3 and 13; March 6 and 24; April 10, 28 and 29; May 6 and 26; June 29 and 30. Meeting dates July through December will be selected later.

As facilitator of this group, I find the members experienced, willing to roll up their sleeves to work, appropriately watchful of each others motivations, and willing to start fresh with each other to tackle a mutual, very difficult task.