Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Sustainable Harvest Calculation for Eastern Washington

Staff Report

To: Sustainable Harvest Calculation (SHC) Steering Committee

From: SHC Project Team

Prepared by: Anchal Rikhi, Sustainable Harvest Planner

Subject: American Goshawk

Proposed Action

The Sustainable Harvest Calculation (SHC) Steering Committee should determine how to address protection of American goshawk nests and habitat in the forest estate model to be used in the sustainable harvest calculation for eastern Washington.

Background

The northern goshawk is an uncommon forest raptor that occupies a variety of montane and boreal forests throughout Eurasia and North America. In 2023, the American Ornithological Society split the northern goshawk into two species: American goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) and Eurasian goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*). In Washington, American goshawks nest almost exclusively in late-seral stage coniferous forests. As of 2003, there were 338 documented breeding territories in Washington. The exact number is not known, because monitoring is not currently being conducted. About 50% of the documented breeding territories occur in the eastern Cascades and 12% in other forested areas in northeast and southeast Washington (WDFW, Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species, Volume IV: Birds).

The goshawk is not a federally listed threatened or endangered species, but it is identified as a priority species by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and is listed in the U.S. Forest Service, Region 6, Regional Forester's list of sensitive species. PR 14-004-261: Protecting Northern Goshawks East of the Cascades states that one of the overall objectives of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to contribute to the maintenance of populations of certain unlisted species, such as the goshawk. Additionally, the Policy for Sustainable Forests (pp.36) states that when consistent with trust objectives, the department intends to voluntarily participate in initiatives related to non-listed species and habitats. However, little is known about goshawk biology, habitat requisites, and species distribution. This lack of knowledge makes developing a protection strategy challenging. Therefore, this procedure is to be implemented in a localized area on an interim basis while developing a landscape approach to multi-species management for eastern Washington.

The procedure establishes protections for goshawk nests and habitat in all forested ecosystems within Chelan, Kittitas, Yakima, and Klickitat counties which are encompassed by Southeast Region. Interim management in the remainder of eastern Washington is conducted on a site-by-site basis. The intent of this procedure is to provide protection to known occupied goshawk nests by minimizing disturbance to goshawk nesting habitat and providing mature, complex forest conditions within an ecologically important area around the identified nest sites.

In eastern Washington, DNR currently defers about 2105 forested acres for occupied goshawk nest patches. These deferred lands compose approximately 0.3% of the total forested acreage of DNR-managed lands in eastern Washington.

Southeast Region Goshawk Management

Under PR 14-004-261, where DNR manages 640 contiguous acres and a management activity is located within 0.5 mile of any known active or inactive nest, two 50-acre nest patches are established that encompass the known nest or nests and are within 0.8 miles of each other. No management activities are allowed within the nest patches. If a single 50-acre nest patch is able to encompass all known active and inactive nests, then a second alternate nest habitat patch should be established which encompasses high quality or 'next-best' nesting habitat. Within the alternate nesting habitat patch, management activities can be conducted with the objective of achieving a mature forest. Restrictions in management activities include prohibiting the cutting of trees that are over 18-inches diameter and maintaining a minimum basal area of 120-square feet per acre. Additionally, there is a 0.5-mile fledgling support area around all nest sites in which 50% of the DNR-managed lands are managed to support post fledgling habitat for goshawks and a mature forest condition. A timing restriction is applied to all management activities between April 1 to August 31 that are within 0.5 mile of an active goshawk nest.

Known nests must be surveyed prior to planning new management activities in the vicinity to determine the activity status. A nest is considered inactive when it was not in use during the most recent breeding season. However, goshawks tend to have multiple alternate nests within their home range that may be used in different years and for decades (Reynold et al, 1992). If nest sites are found to be inactive within a nest patch, that nest patch can be released from deferral by a region biologist.

As of October 2024, there are approximately 861 forested acres deferred for goshawk management in Southeast Region. There are 10 established nest patches and the average size is about 100 acres (including adjacent alternate nest patches). Known nest sites are surveyed opportunistically, typically associated with harvest activities. To date, no nest patches have been released from deferral in the region, potentially due to the inability to consistently survey nest patches. Additionally in Southeast Region, approximately 15,184 forested acres are encompassed in fledgling support areas and are subject to management objectives and a timing restriction.

Northeast Region Goshawk Management

In Northeast Region, goshawk management is based on the direction from PR 14-004-261, the Policy for Sustainable Forests, and WDFW Priority Habitat and Species Management

Recommendations for the northern goshawk. When a forester finds or suspects goshawk presence on a proposed timber sale, a biologist will conduct field surveys to determine goshawk presence and the location of goshawk nests within the timber sale area. If a nest is found, the biologist recommends measures to protect the nest stand by delineating the nest stand and deferring this area from harvest. A timing restriction is also applied to the 0.5-mile fledgling support area around all nest sites from March 15 to August 1, or until the young in the nest have fledged.

As of November 2024, there are approximately 1244 forested acres deferred for goshawk management in Northeast Region. There are 35 established nest patches and the average size is about 37 acres. Known nest sites are surveyed opportunistically, typically during pre-harvest and post-harvest, resulting in about half the known nest sites being surveyed every year. To date, no nest patches have been released from deferral in the region, potentially due to the inability to consistently survey nest patches. Additionally in Northeast Region, approximately 6,002 forested acres are encompassed in fledgling support areas and are subject to a timing restriction.

Analysis

It is important to note that the SHC is required to be recalculated every ten years. While this decision will affect the long-term assumptions in the forest estate model, the assumption for the first decade is the most important because it is the decision that will impact operations in the current planning decade. DNR can update its assumptions for subsequent decades as goshawk population data, listing status, and procedure updates dictate in future SHCs.

Additionally, the discussion of how to treat nest patch deferrals impacts other goshawk protections. If nest patches are released from deferral, PFA and nest site protections are also released.

Option 1: Time-limited nest patch deferrals.

This option will maintain current nest patch deferrals as static for the first decade. After the first decade, all nest patches will be released from deferral.

Nest site deferrals are only in place while a forest practice activity is active and a goshawk nest is active. Goshawk management practices in both Northeast and Southeast regions allow nest patches to be released from deferral if the required criteria are met. Whether current nest patches will still be deferred at the time of the next harvest rotation is uncertain, but the lifespan of goshawks do not usually exceed the length of a harvest rotation, so it would be unlikely. While goshawks do tend to use the same areas for nesting over many years, it would be highly speculative to attempt to model new or continuing nest site deferrals since the location and quantity of the nest sites would be uncertain. For this reason, only including current nest site deferrals in the first decade of the SHC would avoid any speculative or unreasonable assumptions.

There are other types of habitat deferrals which do remain static for all decades of the SHC, such as those that protect uncommon habitats defined in the HCP. These deferrals share major differences with the goshawk nest site deferrals in that they protect habitat features that are likely to persist through multiple harvest rotations. Also, while it is likely that more of these HCP

uncommon habitats will be found and more acres deferred as timber harvests are prepared in the future, the SHC does not attempt to speculate on future deferrals of features that have not yet been found. Similarly, the SHC would not speculate on the persistence of goshawk nests or the discovery of future nests sites if Option 1 is chosen.

Additionally, it could be argued that nest patches should not be considered fixed deferrals because PR 14-004-261 and other current goshawk management practices are being implemented on an interim basis. The future listing status of goshawks and future management practices are difficult to predict due to limited population data in eastern Washington. However, goshawk lands can overlap with other conservation areas, such as Northern Spotted Owl Management Units, that share similar objectives which will benefit multiple species.

One concern with this option is that it assumes that nest patch deferrals will no longer exist after a decade. While this removes uncertainty in the model regarding speculations on future management practices, it may result in falsely allowing more lands to be available for harvest in the model. However, the opposite scenario is also a concern. If the goshawk is removed as a candidate for listing, but the assumption is made that goshawk protections remain static in the model for multiple decades, it may result in falsely deferring lands that should be available for harvest.

Option 2: Current nest patch deferrals are static for all decades.

This option will maintain current nest patch deferrals as static for all decades in the forest estate model. It assumes that goshawk status listing and management practices in the future will be consistent with the current environment. While deferring an individual nest site for decades would not be accurate, this strategy could account for the movement of goshawks around the landscape and the shifting of nest patches. While some nest sites may be deemed inactive resulting in nest patches released from deferral, new nest sites may be found and new nest patches deferred. This strategy would not speculate on these new nest patch locations, though it would assume that the total area deferred in the future would remain consistent. Because no nest patches have been released to date, this option is in alignment with current management practices.

As described in the narrative for Option 1 above, this strategy could be considered speculative and overly conservative. Since goshawk nest deferrals are not expected to remain in place for multiple decades, this strategy would defer portions of the land base that may not be deferred in the future.

Recommendation

The Project Team recommends that the SHC Steering Committee follow Option 1, meaning nest patch deferrals will remain as static deferrals for the first decade and be released from deferral in subsequent decades. When nest patches are released from deferral, other goshawk protections of PFAs and nest sites will also be released. Goshawk nest patches should not be considered fixed deferrals on the landscape because future nest patch deferrals are speculative, protection measures for goshawk are being conducted on an interim basis, and nest patches are allowed to be released from deferral, unlike uncommon habitats defined in the HCP.

Review and Decision

Document was reviewed and/or edited by:

- Glynis Gordon – Project Manager, Environmental Planner – P&P
- Sharon Lumbantobing – Assistant Division Manager – P&P
- Kate McBurney – Assistant Division Manager – FRD
- Andrew Johnson – IT Business Analyst – FRD
- Allen Estep – Assistant Division Manager – FRD
- Larry Leach – Region Manager – Southeast Region
- Brett Walker – Assistant Region Manager – Northeast Region
- Cameron Crump – Forest Resources Division Manager
- Duane Emmons – Assistant Deputy Supervisor for State Uplands
- Sarah Ogden – Trust Outreach Specialist
- Justin Schmal – Environmental Planner – P&P

Document was reviewed by the following members of the SHC Steering Committee

- Todd Welker – Deputy Supervisor for State Uplands
- Duane Emmons – Assistant Deputy Supervisor for State Uplands
- Cameron Crump – Forest Resources Division Manager
- Michael Kearney – Product Sales and Leasing Division Manager

The Steering Committee has approved the staff recommendation as a project decision as of February 18th, 2025.