Protecting Caves

Date: August, 1999

Application: All west-side forested ecosystems managed under the Habitat Conservation Plan, including the Olympic Experimental State Forest Planning Unit.

DISCUSSION

Caves provide important habitat necessary for the complete life cycle of many species of plants and animals, including several species of bats. This procedure describes strategies for management activities that are adjacent to or around cave ecosystems. The main objectives of cave protection include maintaining the microclimate at the cave entrance and the physical integrity of the cave passages, and minimizing human disturbances to bat hibernacula and maternity colonies especially during the summer and winter. While there are few known caves on DNR-managed lands, their contribution and the potential contribution of unknown sites may be important to the various bat species. Since naturally occurring caves are rare within the HCP planning units, care will be taken to protect the existing sites.

The strategy for cave protection will incorporate discovery, exploration, mapping, confidentiality, and minimizing the impacts from management activities near caves, to protect the integrity of the cave environment.

Action

(1) Determine if the proposed management activity occurs within 0.25 mile of a cave recorded in the region species and habitat database or a cave identified during normal activity. If not, end the procedure. If so, go to Step 2.

(2) Field-locate the recorded cave and record those caves identified through field activity into the data base.

(3) Report recorded caves that cannot be found to the region database manager and, with the approval of the region manager, end the procedure.

(4) Incorporate the following conservation measures into the management activity if the cave occurs within 250 feet of the proposed management activity:

(a) Establish a 250-foot-wide buffer around the cave entrance. Do not disturb soil or vegetation within the buffer.

(b) Establish a 100-foot-wide buffer on both sides of the cave passage where surface activity may disturb a cave passage. Do not disturb soils or vegetation within the buffer.

(c) Do not construct roads within 0.25 mile of a cave entrance, when roads can be routed around caves in a practicable manner that is consistent with other objectives of a comprehensive landscape-based road network planning process.

(d) Do not construct roads within 300 feet of a cave passage where surface activities may disturb the passage, and when roads can be routed around caves in a practicable manner, consistent with other objectives of a comprehensive landscape-based road network planning process.

(e) Explore and map newly discovered caves in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before any management activities commence in the vicinity of those caves. Notify the state lands assistant to coordinate exploration. Explorations will be timed to avoid active bat maternity colonies or hibernacula.

(f) Keep cave locations confidential to the extent permitted by law.

(5) Obtain region manager approval for all road construction that the region determines to be necessary and that can not be routed around a cave or cave passage in a practicable manner.

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Forest Resources Division

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