WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

Identifying and Managing Structurally Complex Forests to Meet Older Forest Targets (Westside)

Cancels: Replaces Procedure 14-004-046X:\Old Documents\procedure14-004-046old1.htm dated August 2006.

Date: January, 2007

Application: All forested state trust lands west of the Cascade crest.

DISCUSSION

The Board of Natural Resources General Silvicultural Strategy policy includes direction on older forests for Western Washington and states:

- The department will target 10 to 15 percent of each Western Washington Habitat Conservation Plan planning unit for "older" forests—based on structural characteristics—over time.
- Through landscape assessments, the department will identify suitable structurally complex forest stands to be managed to help meet older-forest targets. Once older-forest targets are met, structurally complex forest stands that are not needed to meet the targets and are not old growth may be considered for harvest activities. Old growth is addressed in the Old-Growth Stands in Western Washington policy (PO 14-008).

The department intends to actively manage suitable structurally complex forests (fully functional, niche diversification, and botanically diverse stand development stages) to meet older forest targets. Older forests are represented by the niche diversification and fully functional stages of stand development. (See Policy for Sustainable Forests Final EIS p. 3-177) Stand structural complexity begins notably in the botanically diverse stage but is significantly functional only in the niche diversification and fully functional stages of stand development (see Final Environmental Impact Statement on Alternatives for Sustainable Forest Management of State Trust Lands in Western Washington, July 2004, section 4, for a description of these stages). The goal is to achieve functional older forest structures across 10 to 15 percent of each Western Washington HCP planning unit within 70 to 100 years.

The HCP planning unit landscape context of a structurally complex stand determines its suitability to be managed to meet older forest targets. The percentage of the planning unit in a structurally complex condition, the location and size of these stands, their proximity to old growth or other structurally complex forest stands, or the scarcity of old growth and other structurally complex stands are all factors in determining if a stand is suitable for contributing to older forest targets. (See Policy for Sustainable Forests Final EIS p. 3-177).

The identification and review of landscape level management strategies to achieve the 10 to 15 percent older forest target will be completed during the forest land planning process that will be conducted for each HCP planning unit. However, until that time, the following programmatic guidance to aid in identifying appropriate stands to manage to meet older forest targets must be followed.

Prior to development of a forest land plan, proposed harvest activities in FMUs that are considered structurally complex forests must be accompanied by the following information: a) an assessment of forest conditions using readily available information, b) an analysis of the known landscape management strategies and, c) role of the structurally complex stand in meeting older forest targets. For the actions listed below, the Land Management Division has sources of information it will make available.

Action

- If a proposed forest management unit is determined to be in one of the three structurally complex stages, assess and describe the landscape conditions. Information provided by Land Management Division may be helpful. Field verification may determine different conditions than the provided datasets. Identify acres of existing structurally complex stands managed for older forest conditions. Those are:
    - Old-growth stands.
    - Structurally complex stands located in special ecological management areas (i.e., designated northern spotted owl NRF or Dispersal Management Areas, riparian management zones, natural areas, gene pool reserves, etc.). Structurally complex stands that are currently meeting targets for various HCP conservation strategies and not identified above, such as suitable northern spotted owl NRF habitat outside of designated NRF and Dispersal Management areas (i.e., high quality nesting habitat, Type A, Type B, and sub-mature habitat).
    - Suitable marbled murrelet nesting habitat and designated marbled murrelet occupied sites.
    - Riparian areas that are currently meeting the Riparian Desired Forest Condition (RDFC).
- Based on the assessment above determine if 10 to 15 percent or more of the HCP planning unit contains structurally complex forest prioritized to meet older forest targets. If yes, stands managed for structural complexity will be designated in a department lands data base. Structurally complex forests in addition to the amount identified and designated may be subject to harvest activities designed to meet other objectives. If no, proceed to the next bullet, below.
- If less than 10 percent of the HCP planning unit contains structurally complex forests prioritized to meet older forest targets based on the assessment, designate in a department lands database additional suitable structurally complex forest stands or acreage to equal 10 to 15 percent of the HCP

planning unit managed for older forest targets. Once those stands designated as suitable constitute at least 10 percent of the HCP planning unit, other (not otherwise withdrawn) stands are available for the full spectrum of timber harvests. Determine suitability based on a landscape context, considering such things as:

- Stand size.
- Proximity to old growth or other structurally complex forest stands in the ownership block, landscape or watershed.
- Scarcity of other structurally complex stands in the ownership block, landscape or watershed.
- Future strategic plans for the stand within the ownership block, landscape or watershed.

- Information gathered in the previous steps should be included in the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) checklist for the proposed harvest activity for public review.
- The Land Management Division Manager may approve variances to this procedure.

Management Considerations:

- The department will defer from final harvest older forest and other structurally complex stands designated as suitable to meet older forest targets.
- Harvest activities in older forest and other structurally complex stands designated as suitable to meet older forest targets must enhance the older forest condition.

APPROVED BY: Gretchen Nicholas, Manager

Land Management Division

January, 2007

SEE ALSO:

- **PR 14-004-045, Old-Growth Timber Harvest Deferral and Protection (Westside)**
- **PR 14-001-030, Settlement Agreement**