WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

PR 14-004-220

Protecting Balds

Date: August, 1999

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

DISCUSSION

This procedure describes the management strategies for activities that are next to or around a bald ecosystem. Balds are openings in the forest, usually on a hilltop or hillside. Balds are usually small, less than 10 acres. Sites are dry, and soil is often shallow. Fires within balds may be far more common than in the surrounding forest. Balds are found throughout the area covered by the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Ground cover is dominated by grasses or moss. Forbs may be present and are sometimes abundant. Shrub patches and seedlings, saplings, and large trees may be present, but the site is open and park-like, unlike the surrounding forest. Balds are necessary for the life cycle of many species of plants and wildlife. In western Washington, balds are sometimes fringed by Oregon white oak. Forest development is prevented in these areas by extreme ecological conditions such as shallow or poor soil, harsh microclimate, high frequency of disturbance, or a combination of these conditions.

Shallow soils are often associated with topographic features such as hilltops, ridges, rock outcrops, or steep hillslopes. Some of these factors may occur together (i.e., a bald may be on a hilltop, have shallow soil, and be subject to frequent summer lightning strikes which ignite fires).

Conserving balds is important because balds are an uncommon plant community and significant habitat for plant and animal species. The availability of sunlight at ground level makes them attractive to elk, deer, reptiles, and amphibians — species which are found elsewhere in a forested landscape. The presence of grassland plant species, which are not otherwise present in a forested landscape, makes balds a significant habitat for numerous species, including several butterfly species, unique host plant taxa, and certain rare butterfly species. Additionally, protecting balds maintains landscape diversity.

The protection strategy for balds is directed at restricting disturbance of this habitat type. Management of balds will be integrated with a landscape's habitat objective.

Action

1. Incorporate the following conservation measure if the bald occurs in or near the management activity:

- Avoid road construction through balds when roads can be routed around the bald in a practicable manner that is consistent with other objectives of a comprehensive landscape-based road network planning process.
- Avoid yarding through balds and operating ground based equipment on balds.
- Avoid other activities that cause ground or vegetation disturbance and that might alter natural plant succession.

APPROVED BY: Michael Perez Gibson, Manager
Forest Resources Division
August, 1999