WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

PR 14-004-045

Old-Growth Timber Harvest Deferral and Protection (Westside)

Cancels: Replaces Guideline GL 14-004-010 dated August 2006

Date: January, 2007
Application: All forested state trust lands west of the Cascade crest.

DISCUSSION

The Board of Natural Resources' policy is to protect and defer timber harvests in all existing old growth on forested state trust lands in Western Washington in order to help meet DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and regulatory requirements, older forest targets, as well as social and cultural values. This procedure provides direction for the identification of old-growth stands on westside forested state trust lands. The Land Management division will train selected region staff (old-growth designees) to identify old-growth stands in the field.

Board of Natural Resources definition of old growth stands: Old growth is defined as stands 5 acres and larger that originated naturally before the year 1850, that are in the most structurally complex stage of stand development, sometimes referred to as fully functional.

The Board of Natural Resources also defined individual trees to be deferred from harvest: Single very large diameter, structurally unique trees (native conifers that are generally 60 inches or more at breast height and possessing large, strong limbs; open crowns; hollow trunks; broken tops and limbs; and deeply furrowed bark) and small patches (less than 5 acres) of such trees will be retained to meet DNR's HCP requirements for large, structurally unique trees.

Identifying Old Growth: The Land Management Division currently maintains a scientifically derived screening tool to assess potential old growth. The current method for identifying old growth using this tool is part of this procedure. This indexing approach to old growth assessment is based on stand-level structural variables identified below and derived from and recorded with Forest Resource Inventory System (FRIS) data (See Policy for Sustainable Forests Final EIS p. 3-60):

1. Number of large live trees greater than 40 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) per acre;
2. Amount of live tree diameter diversity within the stand;
3. Number of large dead standing trees greater than 20 inches dbh per acre; and
4. Volume of down woody debris.

Stand Size: Stands will be documented within the department's capability to inventory and map stands. Currently this capability is limited to stands of 5 acres or larger. Individual or patches (less than 5 acres) of very large, structurally complex trees are addressed through the HCP directive to retain structurally unique trees (HCP, p. IV 156) and PR 14-006-090, Management of Forest Stand Cohorts (January 2007).

Training: The Land Management Division's HCP/Science Section will train and ensure proficiency for selected region staff (region old growth designees) under the guidance of Old Growth Definition Committee members to identify old-growth stands.

Weighted Old-Growth Habitat Index Tool: The Land Management Division's data stewardship section is the data steward of the old-growth index tool. Old Growth Index scores for individual stands are available on the state uplands viewing tool and as GIS data at the scales of the forest inventory unit (FIU) and forest inventory sample point.

Action

1. Access the State Uplands Viewing Tool on the DNR intranet and retrieve Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index scores for sample points that intersect with FMUs in the harvest schedule and all adjacent FIUs. As stand level Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index scores represent a stand-wide average value, it is advisable in most cases to examine point level data, to be sure to capture old growth patches embedded within younger stands. In addition, examine sample points of adjacent stands to avoid missing old growth stands that overlap two or more FIUs.
2. For all westside HCP planning units, a Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index score of 60 or more implies a high likelihood of being old growth. Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index scores between 38 and 59 in the OESF and 50-59 in other westside HCP planning units imply a modest likelihood of being old growth. Any sample points or stands that the Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index identifies as having either a high **or** modest likelihood of being old growth will be field verified by a qualified old-growth designee.
3. Review the area in question using aerial photography. Delineate the divide using the plot level Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index and aerial photography, and confirm through a field assessment. Submit changes to Forest Inventory in the Data Stewardship section, Land Management division in order to implement new, discrete FIUs.
4. Contact the region Old Growth Designee to conduct a field verification of the area in question. Areas in question should be assessed for the presence of old growth using the following criteria as outlined in the Weighted Old Growth Habitat Index:
    - Large trees (number of trees per acre > 40 inches dbh).
    - Large snags (number of standing dead trees per acre > 20 inches dbh and >16 feet tall).
    - Volume of down woody debris (cubic feet per acre).
    - Tree size diversity

    The old growth policy requires old growth stands to have an origin year prior to 1850. Age of the stand is to be determined through evaluation of the physical characteristics of the oldest trees in the stand. Using this information, the Old Growth Designee will make a determination as to the status of the area in

question, and send this determination and documentation of stand condition to LMD, including a report on any necessary modifications of spatial data.

5. If it is determined that the stand in question is old growth, defer it from harvest with the following possible exceptions:
    - Harvest of part of an existing old-growth stand for operational or safety considerations;
    - Harvest of individual very large structurally unique trees that are not part of an old growth stand for operational or safety or other reasons, or if in excess of HCP requirements (see PR 14-006-090, Management of Forest Stand Cohorts (Westside))
    - Harvest of existing old growth to meet research objectives in the OESF planning unit. NOTE: these areas are deferred from harvest for the term of the Settlement Agreement (WEC vs. Sutherland).
    - Harvest of individual trees for cultural/spiritual use by the Tribes to construct ocean going canoes, ceremonial lodges and/or totem poles, or for other cultural/spiritual uses.
6. In addition to deferral of old growth stands from timber harvest, the intent is to protect them from ecological and socio-cultural degradation. Activities such as using existing roads are permissible; proposed timber removal or other activities require prior notification of the Board of Natural Resources and may occur by exception, only.
7. If any of the situations in paragraphs 5. and 6., above, applies, consult with Land Management division before proceeding.
8. The department will notify the Board of Natural Resources of any of these exceptions during monthly presentations to the Board.
9. Record verification of existing old growth along with any new mapping delineation and submit the information to the Forest Inventory program in Land Management division.
10. If further assistance is necessary, contact the Land Management division's HCP/Science section, which will provide a qualified scientist to aid in the assessment of old-growth conditions in the field.
11. Existing roads within old-growth stands will be maintained as necessary.

APPROVED BY: Gretchen Nicholas, Manager
Land Management Division
January, 2007

SEE ALSO:

- PR 14-004-046, Identifying And Managing Structurally Complex Forests To Meet Older Forest Targets (Westside)
- PR 14-001-030, Settlement Agreement