



What is an HCP?

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is prepared by a landowner, in agreement with federal agencies under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This long-term plan guides protection and enhancement of habitats for ‘threatened’ and ‘endangered’ wildlife species, while ongoing natural resource management continues. The landowner negotiates the plan conditions with the USDA Fish & Wildlife Service, and NOAA Fisheries Service (Federal Services).

The central idea of an HCP is to offset any harm that may occur to an individual (animal, or plant) of a species, with protections that promote the long-term health of the species as a whole. This is achieved through habitat conservation, restoration or, in some cases, habitat development.

The HCP agreement includes an “incidental take permit,” which allows that individuals of a listed at-risk species occasionally (presumably rarely) are displaced or killed in the course of management activities in their habitats. This incidental “take” is allowed in view of the broader support for the species as a whole, through habitat conservation and enhancements.

What is Washington’s State Trust Lands HCP?

Washington’s Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is an ecosystem-based forest management plan that was developed by DNR to provide habitat for species such as the Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, and riparian-dependant species such as salmon and bull trout. These species are at some level of risk of extinction — listed as ‘threatened’ or ‘endangered’ under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The HCP applies to Washington’s forested State Trust lands within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl.

The State Trust lands are managed by DNR to provide revenue to build the state’s public schools and universities, and other state institutions. Some State Trust lands help fund local services in the county in which the trust lands are located. Revenue-producing activities include timber harvesting and leasing trust lands for communication towers, wind energy production, and more.

The HCP helps DNR develop and protect habitat for at- risk species, while carrying out forest management and other revenue producing activities. The Trust Lands HCP is designed as a ‘multi-species’ plan, because in protecting the habitats needed by listed species, we also provide habitat for other species that depend on the same habitats— species that also may be declining in numbers.

The Trust Lands HCP enables DNR to meet Endangered Species Act requirements by defining specific conservation objectives and strategies that provide habitat for listed and unlisted species. While this conservation is taking place the HCP provides certainty, flexibility, and stability for DNR to meet its trust responsibilities. The Trust Lands HCP outlines a suite of specific commitments authorized under the ESA, and is administered in partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries Service (collectively known as the Services).

This HCP applies to all forested state Trust lands managed by DNR west of the Cascade Crest, excluding those trust lands in areas that have been designated as urban or leased for commercial purposes. In addition, the Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy extends to the east flank of the Cascade Mountains from the Canadian border to the Columbia River. In total, the Trust Lands HCP applies to 1.8 million acres of trust forests within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl.

What does the Trust lands HCP protect?

In addition to Northern Spotted Owls (*Strix occidentalis*), Marbled Murrelets (*Brachyramphus marmorates*) and salmonids, the Trust Lands HCP conserves habitat for the federally listed Oregon Silverspot Butterfly (*Speyeria zerene hippolyta*), the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*), Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*), and the Columbian White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*), as well as federally listed or candidate plant species and other plant species of concern. The Trust Lands HCP also guides DNR’s conservation of uncommon

habitats — including talus fields, caves, cliffs, oak woodlands, large snags, balds, mineral springs, and large, structurally unique trees.

In keeping with the Trust Lands HCP objectives for conservation of critical habitats, old-growth forest in the five Westside HCP planning units also is protected through DNR's overarching Policy for Sustainable Forests. Other species of concern include some Washington State-listed, candidate species, or non-listed animals that may be declining, including mollusks, arthropods, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds or mammals. For more information, please see the Final Habitat Conservation Plan, Washington DNR, 1997, Chapter 1.

Conservation Strategies

The Trust Lands HCP is structured around habitat conservation strategies for the species 'listed' (as at some risk of extinction) under the Endangered Species Act — Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, and riparian-dependant salmonid species such as Bull Trout and salmon. The HCP also includes a multi-species conservation strategy to address the habitat needs of other species of concern, which may be state-listed, state or federal candidate species, or not listed.

HCP strategies also specifically protect uncommon habitats such as balds, talus fields, cliffs and large structurally unique trees. By doing so, we help protect the species that depend on these habitats. By providing appropriate habitat protection for species not currently listed or protected under the ESA, DNR hopes both to conserve critical ecosystems and avoid future disruptions to land management planning and activities caused by new ESA listings. For instance, over 100 populations of salmon and steelhead have been federally listed as threatened or endangered in Washington since adoption of the Trust Lands HCP. Because DNR has developed a Riparian Forest Restoration Strategy that protects streams for salmonids and other riparian-dependant species under the Trust Lands HCP, there was no disruption to DNR's management activities as a result of listings of such populations on State Trust lands.

The HCP is a dynamic, scientifically-based management planning tool, which allows strengthening and refinement of conservation strategies as new information becomes available, with the approval of the Federal Services.

At the time the HCP was adopted in January 1997, we recognized that we did not have sufficient information to complete either the long-term riparian or the Marbled Murrelet strategies. Using the best scientific information available, a team of biologists, ecologists and foresters developed interim strategies. With these interim habitat protections in place, DNR moved forward with research designed to provide information for long-term conservation strategy development.

What is adaptive management?

Adaptive management is the process by which DNR responds to new scientific information, by changing management to incorporate the best available science.

Examples of adaptive management in action are amendments to the HCP including a revised strategy for North Spotted Owl habitat management for the southeast portion of the owl's range and in the South Puget HCP Planning Unit, and a Riparian Forest Restoration Strategy that takes in most of Western Washington. Such changes to the HCP are approved by the Federal Services.