



June 6, 2006

Washington State Receives Approval for Nation's Largest Habitat Conservation Plan

The State of Washington has received approval for the nation's largest and most thorough Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Covering 70 species of native fish and amphibians, the plan took a decade to develop and covers 9.3 million acres of state and private forestland and more than 60,000 miles of streams. The HCP states that Washington's State Forest Practices Rules are strong enough to protect fish habitat and water quality in accordance with strict Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements.

Forestry is but one part of the salmon life-cycle, and the HCP is a commitment to the public and a commitment to the resource that forest managers will do their part in protecting fish habitat and water quality over the long-term. At the signing ceremony on June 5, 2006, Governor Gregoire said "this HCP is unique in that it is based on science". Since science and data do change over time, we must learn as we go, and the adaptive management process allows us to incorporate this new information.

Commissioner Sutherland, noted that "since the HCP is a 50 year contract, today begins the next step of making this work". Regional administrator for NOAA/National Marine Fisheries, Bob Lohn, put the HCP into perspective. He pointed out that the ESA is an extraordinary law for protecting species and their habitat. It also allows individuals and groups to develop conservation plans that meet the particular needs of the local people, culture, environment, industry and species. If the affected people can develop a long-term plan, the federal government will say, "you have done your fair share". Regional Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Dave Allen stated that this HCP is testament to the cooperative spirit and partnership that are possible and necessary for species recovery. "The cornerstone of the HCP is the Forests & Fish Law - and includes adaptive management which ensures all stakeholders have a place at the table".

Bill Wilkerson, Executive Director of WFPA, representing large timber landowners noted that "we've done something pretty special for the resources in Washington, this benefits the public and I'm glad we had the guts to stay the course". Senator Regala, one of the prime supporters of the Forests & Fish Law noted the importance of staying on the path we chose,

"a path to take us where science leads. This will lead to good on the ground management of healthy forests and streams". The HCP was set into motion by the Forests & Fish Law, which passed the Legislature with strong bi-partisan majority support and was implemented by the state Forest Practices Rules in 2001.

Since then, landowners have been making on-the-ground improvements to roads, leaving more trees next to streams for shade, and protecting steep slopes. Road maintenance planning, which includes upgraded roads to the new standards, is on schedule. To date more than 58,000 miles of road have been inventoried. And fish habitat has been reopened on about 800 miles of streams by removing nearly 1,400 blockages.

A prominent feature of the plan is adaptive management, a process for changing the rules as new science becomes available. This process also ensures that the new rules are protecting salmon habitat and water quality by monitoring and measuring results against targeted benchmarks.

The Forests & Fish Law and subsequent Habitat Conservation Plan is part of Washington's Statewide Salmon Recovery Strategy. Washington's Congressional delegation unanimously support these efforts at the time as a model for how creative partnerships between the public and private sector can be used to balance the needs of people with the protection of the environment.

The commitment of our state to address salmon and water issues in a proactive and collaborative way sets Washington State apart and demonstrates our commitment and foresight to maintaining the health of our environment and forest industry.