

ENCLOSURE 1

Utah Northern Goshawk Project

Statement of Purpose and Need

PURPOSE

The purpose of this action is to provide management direction that maintains or restores functioning forested habitats for the northern goshawk and its prey on National Forest System lands within the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests. Functioning forested habitats are important in sustaining viable populations of northern goshawks in Utah.

NEED

A habitat assessment and management recommendations for the northern goshawk and subsequent habitat conservation strategy were developed for the State of Utah in response to suspected downward trends in goshawk habitat and/or populations. Because of the important role National Forest System lands will play in restoring or maintaining forested habitat for the northern goshawk, there is an immediate need to incorporate the principles and recommendations in these documents into management direction, for the reasons described below.

Changes in forest structure, especially large tree removal, and other forest management activities singly or in combination may negatively affect goshawk populations (Crocker-Bedford 1990). Perhaps one of the greatest influences on habitat is fire exclusion from forest and woodland ecosystems. Successful fire exclusion has altered native successional pathways, resulting in the ingrowth of shade-tolerant tree species throughout Utah. With these changes in habitat came suspected declines in goshawk populations in much of the western United States (Bloom and others 1986, Herron and others 1985, Kennedy 1989). [Graham et al. 1999, in press]

In 1991, the goshawk was designated as a sensitive species in the USDA Forest Service Intermountain Region (Region 4). In March 1997, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources classified the goshawk as a sensitive species. This designation identifies species in the State that are most vulnerable to population declines or habitat loss and stimulates management actions for the conservation of the species. To address the issue of declining goshawk habitat in Utah, a Northern Goshawk Interagency Technical Team was created. This team was charged with completing an assessment for the State of Utah.

The habitat assessment (Graham et al. 1999, in press) provided a detailed description of current habitat conditions and capabilities and found them adequate to support nesting goshawks at the current time and at the scale analyzed. However, the scientists were not able to predict future habitat conditions because of the great latitude in management allowed by current land management plans and policies on state and federal lands. Current management plans and policies are flexible enough to both permit activities that address habitat needs for the goshawk as well as allow those that do not.

In response to the findings in the habitat assessment, a team of Forest Service biologists, supported by Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service and USDI, Bureau of Land Management biologists, began the development of a Habitat Conservation Strategy (HCS) for the northern goshawk. This strategy, completed in September 1998, recommends additional site specific measures that, if implemented, will ensure that habitat for the goshawk is managed consistently across

federal and state lands in Utah. By incorporating the principles recommended in the HCS "agencies will contribute to sustaining short and long term habitat for goshawks which is important to their overall viability across the state. ... Consistency in management of habitat is key to providing a reasonable probability of goshawk persistence." [HCS, 1998]

All forested habitats in Utah are potentially suitable habitat for the goshawk. This includes coniferous and aspen forests, but does not include woodlands (e.g., pinyon/juniper). The assessment (Graham et al. 1999, in press) found that 84 percent of the medium and high valued nesting habitat, and 81 percent of the optimum and high valued habitat for the northern goshawk in Utah are found on National Forest System lands. Due to the important role National Forest System lands will play in restoring or maintaining habitat for the northern goshawk in Utah, the Forest Service elected to take immediate action to determine how to incorporate principles recommended in the HCS into management actions proposed in the future.

To aid in this determination, each of the six National Forests in Utah completed Supplemental Information Reports (SIRs). The SIRs analyzed if the HCS represented significant new information or changed conditions bearing on their current Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) management direction or effects identified in the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement. Preliminary findings in the SIRs indicated that amendments to current Forest Plans and/or the Intermountain Regional Guide will be required to implement some elements of the strategy.

This action will amend management direction in Forest Plans and/or the Intermountain Regional Guide. When forest plans for the affected National Forests are revised or suitably amended (estimated to be 2-4 years out), the management direction will be reviewed and updated as needed. This immediate action will maintain habitat quantity, quality, and distribution on National Forest System lands important to supporting viable populations of goshawks in Utah for the remainder of the current planning period. It will also provide consistency in project design, implementation and monitoring where habitat for the goshawk and its prey is involved within the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests. By taking action now, options for future management direction that these National Forests may want to consider during forest plan revision or amendment efforts will be retained.