



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Klamath
National
Forest

1312 Fairlane Road
Yreka, CA 96097-9549
(530) 842-6131
(530) 841-4573 TDD

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Subject: Klamath NF Elk Habitat Management Strategy

To: District Rangers

Developing a Klamath N.F. Elk Habitat Management Strategy was a Forest Supervisor's Emphasis Objective in FY 2005 and a prototype for Region 5 that was presented at the 2004 Rocky Mountain Elk Camp Summit to the California Federal Land Managers. The purpose of the strategy is to reach common understanding of the scale of elk occupancy, habitat use patterns, habitat suitability, and factors which may limit the health of current or future elk herds. The strategy uses known information, elk habitat modeling, GIS resource mapping, and radio-telemetry data to determine existing habitat use, habitat condition, and potential for optimizing elk habitat on a Forest-wide scale.

Prior to this effort, there was no comprehensive strategy that pulled known information together to better understand elk herds, their seasonal range, patterns of use, current habitat conditions, and their enhancement potential.

The Klamath and Six Rivers National Forests, California Department of Fish and Game, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation formed a working group to develop this strategy. The most significant piece of the strategy was a model called Arc Habitat Suitability Index (ArcHSI; USDA-FS, Rocky Mtn. Forest and Range Research Station), which assesses habitat variables (cover, forage, and habitat distribution) to determine a habitat suitability score.

The ArcHSI model was localized to determine habitat communities that were "high value elk habitat" or had "high restoration potential". Habitats for eastside Rocky Mountain elk and westside Roosevelt elk were evaluated within designated herds by their seasonal winter, transition and summer ranges. The 'Strategy' provides the Klamath NF a format for sharing known Klamath elk information and a spatial habitat suitability analysis that indicates restoration potential and priority. Investments in projects can be prioritized and partnerships developed to make commitments at the right scale and of highest priority using results from this comprehensive analysis.

The 'Strategy' map product identifies vegetation communities that have high potential, through structural manipulation, to become high value habitat. The Forest can initially use this information to identify priority candidate habitat improvement project areas. The results indicate, for example, that addressing a shortage of elk winter range and conifer densification former oak woodlands are critical to survival and productivity of elk populations on the Forest. Multiple objectives and funding sources can be matched to contribute to a healthy ecosystem and improved winter range for elk. Different factors are indicated on the Eastside herds, but the concept remains the same.

Please use the 'Strategy' as a basis for developing Elk habitat restoration proposals and as a consideration in planning vegetation treatments through all available avenues. The strategy is housed on the Forest Website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/klamath/> for use by employees, our partners, and the public. The Forest Supervisor and Deputy Forest Supervisor will ensure that proposals to partnership sources for Elk habitat restoration are consistent with the 'Strategy' prior to authorizing proposals for submittal.

/s/ Margaret J. Boland
MARGARET J. BOLAND
Forest Supervisor

cc: Julie Perrochet
Sam Cuenca
Karen M West



Susan R Stresser
Christy A Cheyne
Max Creasy
Dan S Blessing
James L Stout