

Forest Plan Revision for the Colville, Okanogan, and Wenatchee National Forests

March 17, 2006

Forest Plan Revision and Aquatic Conservation in Brief

Background

1988-1990

Forest Plans were implemented in the late 1980s and 1990 and currently provide land management direction to managers of the Colville, Okanogan, and Wenatchee National Forests. Revision of these forest plans is now in progress. Social, ecological, and economic changes that have occurred since forest plan implementation will be addressed and incorporated into the revised Forest Plans. Revision of the Forest Plans will provide national forest managers with updated land management direction that will be consistent with current conditions.

One change that has occurred since forest plans were implemented is the listing of several species of fish as either “threatened or endangered” under the Endangered Species Act. Since implementation of the forest plans, three separate “aquatic conservation strategies” have been implemented in order to maintain or restore the diverse habitat needs of fish located within the Colville, Okanogan, and Wenatchee National Forests.

1994

In April, 1994, President Clinton’s “**Northwest Forest Plan**” was implemented. As part of the Northwest Forest Plan, the **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** was developed to restore and maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. The strategy is intended to protect salmon and steelhead habitat located on federal lands managed under the Northwest Forest Plan. The strategy employs several tactics to approach a goal of maintaining the “natural” disturbance regime.

1995

In collaboration and consultation with other state and federal agencies, the Forest Service implemented an interim strategy known as **PACFISH** in February, 1995 to manage **anadromous fish** producing watersheds on Forest Service and BLM lands of eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and portions of California, except for those areas under direction contained in the Northwest Forest Plan. This interim strategy was designed to halt the degradation and begin the restoration of anadromous fish habitat. PACFISH remains interim policy until revision of Forest Plans is completed.

1995

In July, 1995, the Forest Service implemented interim management direction intended to maintain options for **inland native fish**. This strategy known as **INFISH** is intended to reduce the risk of population loss, and to reduce potential negative impacts to aquatic habitat of inland native fish on national forests of eastern Washington and Oregon, Idaho, western Montana and a small portion of Nevada (except for those areas under the direction contained in PACFISH and the Northwest Forest Plan.) INFISH provides programmatic mitigation measures for potential environmental effects which may result from implementation of projects and activities. INFISH also remains interim policy until revision of Forest Plans is completed.

Need for Change

2006

The contents (intent, tactics, etc.) of the three existing aquatic conservation strategies: the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy, PACFISH, and INFISH are quite similar. The main differences between the strategies include the types of fisheries/riparian dependent species, and geographic area for which the different strategies provide land management direction. The three strategies are working well for the portions of the national forests for which they currently provide guidance. Region 6 of the Forest Service is developing a unified aquatic/riparian conservation strategy framework to be incorporated in forest plan revision.

The Wenatchee National Forest is directed by the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy as are portions of the Okanogan National Forest. However, PACFISH and INFISH also provide guidance to portions of the Okanogan National Forest. The Colville National Forest is governed by INFISH.

Land management direction for the three national forests undergoing forest plan revision could be clarified and streamlined by condensing three aquatic conservation strategies down to one strategy. For example, the three conservation strategies currently in place use different terminology for similar concepts or management intent. Some areas of the national forest also have more than one aquatic conservation strategy being used on geographic areas in very close proximity. The west side of the Chewuch River of the Okanogan National Forest, for example, is governed by the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy while PACFISH directs management of the east side of the Chewuch River.

By consolidating and incorporating components of all three aquatic conservation strategies into one strategy, redundancy and confusion in terms can be eliminated. One aquatic conservation strategy would facilitate more effective national forest management. The result would yield good distribution of watershed conditions resilient to natural disturbance, and which provide habitats for aquatic and dependent natural resources.

Effects of Forest Plan Revision

After completion of forest plan revision, not much is anticipated to change in national forest management related to fisheries and riparian dependent species. As currently is the case, human uses such as recreation, grazing, timber harvest, etc. will be allowed in riparian areas as long as desired conditions for aquatic ecosystems and riparian areas can be achieved. In practice, national forest management practices are not expected to change from current practices. A decision will, however, need to be made on whether three aquatic conservation strategies currently in use on the Colville, Okanogan, and Wenatchee National Forests should be consolidated into one strategy. The public will have the opportunity to review how the Forest Service proposes to implement the consolidated aquatic conservation strategy as well as provide input to specific proposed projects.