
Federal Lands

1. Organizing Question

Are there ways to enhance the contributions of federal lands to rural economies, trust revenue, or marbled murrelet conservation?

2. Background and Context

The federal government manages 43% (9.5 million acres) of Washington's forestland.¹ In counties entirely within the marbled murrelet's Washington range, the federal government manages 4.3 million acres of (mostly forested) land compared to 1.2 million (mostly forested) acres managed by DNR (Table 1). These federal lands are primarily managed by USDA Forest Service (USFS, 2.5 million acres, 58%) and USDI National Park Service (NPS, 1.7 million acres, 39%).

USFS lands are managed "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." From 1990 to 2015, timber harvested from USFS lands in western Washington declined by an order of magnitude, from 504 MMBF² to 42 MMBF.³ NPS lands are not actively managed, rather NPS "preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations."

USFS lands contribute to rural economies through both timber harvest and outdoor recreation. NPS lands also contribute through outdoor recreation, but do not have timber harvest. USFS lands in western Washington have the potential to make a greater contribution to rural economies through additional timber harvest that is part of forest health, ecosystem restoration, and climate resilience efforts. Both USFS and NPS lands provide conservation benefits for marbled murrelets and other species. Habitat restoration and development efforts on USFS lands have the potential to increase murrelet benefits.

3. Potential Opportunities

The main opportunities associated with federal lands are around increasing annual timber volume and improving murrelet habitat. Potential goals include:

¹ Washington Forest Protection Association unpublished data (www.wfpa.org/sustainable-forestry/)

² Larsen, D. N. 1991. Washington timber harvest--1990. Wash. Dep. Nat. Resour., Olympia. 50p.

³ Smith, D. 2016. 2015 Washington timber harvest report. Wash. Dep. Nat. Resour., Olympia. 43p.

- Increase the annual timber volume harvested from USFS lands in western Washington by 20 MMBF within 5 years (2024) through collaborative efforts to improve forest health, restore forest ecosystems, and increase resilience.
- Increase DNR's annual sustainable harvest volume by 20 MMBF within 5 years (2024) by exchanging DNR-managed forest lands in western Washington that are inoperable due to Endangered Species Act encumbrances for USFS forestlands that are operable under DNR's Final Habitat Conservation Plan and other policies.
- Determine whether silvicultural treatments can accelerate murrelet habitat development without causing take.

The target increases in timber volume from USFS and DNR forestlands would maintain or slightly increase timber jobs. If silvicultural treatments can be determined that accelerate murrelet habitat development without causing take, a small additional timber volume in the form of pre-commercial and/or commercial thinning products would result. The target increase in timber volume from DNR-managed lands would increase trust revenue: assuming a 20 MMBF increase in annual sustainable harvest volume and \$260 per MBF, trust revenue would increase by \$5.2 million per year. All murrelet habitat that is currently in conservation status would continue to be protected. Successful habitat development experiments would make possible treatments that, if broadly applied, would increase the speed at which murrelet habitat increases across the landscape.

4. Challenges/Uncertainties

Low Profile of DNR's Federal Lands Program. DNR's federal lands program needs to be carefully nurtured. The program is off to a strong start, program leadership is doing an outstanding job, and much good work is being accomplished. However, the program has a fairly low profile. How it works, what its benefits are, and where it's headed next may not be as widely understood as would be optimal. The program needs a higher profile and conspicuous support to thrive and reach its full potential.

Stakeholder Apprehension. Any effort to increase timber volume from federal lands--no matter how well founded--would likely be met with suspicion from some who fear a return to the "old days" of deficit timber sales, poorly configured and executed harvest plans, and widespread resource damage. There would be a need to constructively engage stakeholders who have an aversion to federal timber harvest. The prospect of a DNR-USFS land exchange would concern those who fear a broad sell-off of National Forest lands to extractive interests.

Inertia. Many have grown accustomed to decades of diminished timber harvest on National Forest lands and an organizational tendency to avoid controversy and conflict. Others, earlier in their careers, have never worked in an active management environment. It will be emotionally and professionally difficult for some to support activities that include timber harvest and make decisions with which some stakeholders disagree.

Lack of USFWS Support for Murrelet Habitat Development. USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) does not support the use of silviculture to accelerate murrelet habitat development and currently views any such activity as take. There is an important conversation ahead to convince USFWS to participate as

a partner in research to determine whether silvicultural treatments can accelerate habitat development without causing take.

5. Potential Next Steps

Stakeholder & Community Outreach

Good Neighbor Agreement. Actively support DNR's and USFS's application of their Good Neighbor Agreement to carry out projects aimed at improving forest health, restoring forest ecosystems, and increasing resilience on USFS lands. Engage stakeholders in project areas to collaboratively solve problems, address fears, explain and improve project benefits, promote good communications and working relationships, and head off administrative challenges.

Exploring Regulatory and Financial Incentives

Land Exchange. Collaborate in designing a land exchange between DNR and USFS that transfers operable forestlands to DNR and threatened species habitat to USFS. DNR intends to reach out to USFS to begin this conversation focusing on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and DNR-managed lands in Skamania County. Embrace this opportunity to help DNR's trust beneficiaries and to help USFS strengthen its ability to meet its wildlife conservation goals.

Think broadly and creatively to improve the long-term configuration of threatened species habitat across federal and state jurisdictions in western Washington. Consider the potential to use land transactions to form a federal nucleus of marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl habitat in Southwest Washington as an anchor for state and private conservation efforts. Potentially re-envision and expand the roles of Willapa, Lewis and Clark, Julia Butler Hansen, and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuges.

Research & Data Analysis

Habitat Development. Collaboratively fund, design, and carry out research to determine whether silvicultural treatments can be used to accelerate murrelet habitat development without causing take. Situate experimental replicates on federal, state, and private forestlands.

Other Actions

Collaboration with USFS. Participate in collaborative discussions between DNR and USFS aimed at identifying new or overlooked ways in which USFS lands can provide greater support for rural economies.

Table 1. Federal lands and lands managed by Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in counties entirely within the Washington range of the marbled murrelet.

County	Federal Lands ¹				DNR ²
	USFS ³	NPS ³	Other	Total	
Clallam	195,239	328,783	1,088	525,110	161,977
Grays Harbor	135,980	6,564	1,716	144,260	92,349
Island	0	0	8,980	8,980	340
Jefferson	163,413	540,169	3,924	707,506	208,013
King	345,350	0	3,557	348,907	117,563
Kitsap	0	0	9,201	9,201	14,327
Mason	125,992	37,757	370	164,119	58,763
Pacific	0	0	11,489	11,489	87,008
Pierce	129,454	206,454	73,952	409,860	24,977
San Juan	0	1,725	897	2,622	688
Skagit	351,882	164,904	315	517,101	141,293
Snohomish	631,030	0	6,374	637,404	157,272
Thurston	0	0	19,592	19,592	64,648
Wahkiakum	0	0	2,884	2,884	40,200
Whatcom	429,294	388,756	373	818,423	88,790
TOTAL	2,507,634	1,675,112	144,712	4,327,458	1,258,210

¹ Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office unpublished data (www.rco.wa.gov/documents/plip/County_Profiles.pdf).

² DNR unpublished data (<http://sharepoint/sites/frc/teams/reports/default.aspx>).

³ NPS = USDI National Park Service, USFS = USDA Forest Service.