



File: 36000-05/IWMS

OCT 17 2012

To: District Managers
Director, Resource Management
Section Heads: Ecosystems, Resource Initiatives, Stewardship

Re: Regional Guidelines: West Coast Region Wildlife Habitat Area Strategy

Enclosed is the West Coast Region Wildlife Habitat Area Strategy. These regional guidelines outline the process for establishing wildlife habitat areas and implementation of Identified Wildlife Management Strategy (IWMS) on the West Coast.

The strategy has been discussed by Coast Assistant Deputy Minister and the Chief Forester. The strategy incorporates existing direction under the IWMS and Government Actions Regulation and outlines a collaborative approach that seeks licensee and stakeholder input in the process of developing Wildlife Habitat Area proposals for decision by the Delegated Decision Maker.

I understand that the IWMS policy is under review. If new direction is provided, these guidelines will be amended.

Please share this document with appropriate staff to ensure that all employees who are involved in Wildlife Habitat Area and species-at-risk conservation planning understand the process undertaken to conserve species at risk habitat in the region. Regional Ecosystems staff are available to discuss this issue and provide awareness training for districts and other regional sections.


Sharon Hadway
Regional Executive Director
West Coast Region

Attachments: Regional Guidelines

cc: Heather MacKnight, Regional Executive Director, South Coast Region
Andy Witt, Manager, Habitat Management, Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Branch
Scott Barrett, Ecosystems Section Head, South Coast Region
Greg George, Senior Ecosystems Biologist, Chilliwack District

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REGIONAL GUIDELINES

WEST COAST REGION WILDLIFE HABITAT AREA STRATEGY

Application and Scope

The attached strategy applies to the development of Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) proposals within the West Coast Region, Coast Area, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations for submission to decision makers under the Government Actions Regulation of the *Forest and Range Practices Act*.

Background

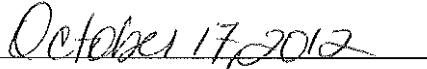
Ecosystems staff recognised that the details of developing, and consulting on the creation of WHA proposals had evolved over the last few years, as had the aspiration and necessity to collaborate with affected forest tenure holders and other stakeholders. The strategy was developed to clearly indicate the procedures required to bring forward conservation proposals for the benefit of staff, regional executive and affected licensees. Application of the strategy will support consistent processes in the development of WHAs and licensees can expect to better appreciate how this important business process is undertaken demonstrating a consistent and transparent approach. Senior ministry staff reviewed the strategy and provided concurrence and support. The strategy was presented to the Coast Operational Issues Forum in January, 2012.

Region Guidelines Intent

To provide a consistent approach for Ecosystem Biologists to follow in developing habitat conservation proposals for species eligible under the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy and Government Actions Regulation, as well as seeking information and collaboration from affected stakeholders.

Approved:


Sharon Hadway
Regional Executive Director
West Coast Region


Date

West Coast Region Wildlife Habitat Areas Planning Strategy

In order for government to achieve multiple objectives on the crown forest land base, The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNR) West Coast Region staff members have developed an approach to planning for Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHAs) that maximizes habitat protection for *Identified Wildlife* (species and ecosystems at risk (SEAR)) while ensuring that impacts to forest licensees are minimized. Foremost in the strategy is the commitment to view collaboration between government and forest licensees as necessary to optimize the outcomes of planning efforts.

In the past, much focus has been on the timber supply impact accounting aspects of IWMS implementation. The 1996 Forest Practices Code Timber Supply Analysis assumed species such as Northern Goshawks (NOGO) and Marbled Murrelets (MAMU) would be addressed by higher-level planning. Although this assumption has changed over time, co-location with other designations has been maintained as an important principle and government is relying heavily on designations such as Old Growth Management Areas (OGMAs) and processes such as Strategic Landscape Reserve Design in the Central and North Coast for SEAR with old growth dependent conservation needs. OGMAs typically are managed with greater flexibility, but increased certainty for managing SEAR can be achieved by co-locating WHAs and OGMAs where those values exist. This often requires General Wildlife Measures (GWMs) that may somewhat reduce the flexibility to ensure that management of the land base meets objectives for both old growth representation and SEAR conservation.

The FLNR staff recognized that GAR (Government Actions Regulation) tests that guide the delegated decision maker when considering legal establishment of WHAs presume more careful consideration be applied than simply accepting existing timber supply impact accounting policies (ie. a 1% THLB 'cap' or aspatial impact accounting policy for WHAs/OGMAs). It is also recognized that some timber supply impact accounting policies are not appropriately used as planning targets where they may become the sole barrier to establishing WHAs. This is especially apparent when consensus exists between government and licensees on WHA proposals. For these reasons, a shift in focus to the legislative tests is apparent in the strategy. However, despite the identification of numerous technical issues and inefficiencies involved in accurately accounting for the timber supply impacts of IWMS implementation, FLNR staff recognize the importance of accurately tracking impacts as per existing policies and will continue to seek to do so.

The most important elements of the WHA Planning Strategy are:

- 1) Focussing on high priority species and ecosystems at risk.
- 2) Mindfully setting priorities across spatial scales from the Region to the Watershed to individual WHA proposals.
- 3) Working towards identifying the need for WHA proposals based on identified conservation shortfalls that recognize science-based conservation objectives.
- 4) Co-locating WHAs on existing land base constraints (e.g. non-contributing land base, draft and legal OGMAs, unstable terrain, visuals, riparian, etc.) whenever reasonable.
- 5) Soliciting and providing supporting information relevant to the legislative (GAR) Tests to the best of our ability.

- 6) Recognizing and appropriately accounting for, but not being driven by, policy-based (i.e. 1%) timber supply impact thresholds.
- 7) Demonstrating a commitment to seeking collaboration with licensees, incorporating their input where practicable, and minimizing timber supply impacts.
- 8) Striving for stakeholder agreement, but in case of a lack of consensus, documenting issues for decision-maker consideration and proceeding with WHA submissions such that the uncertainty around designation is resolved in a timely manner.
- 9) Building on existing planning efforts.

The WHA Planning Strategy has been approved as a business approach at the West Coast RMT and has received concurrence from the West Coast Region FLNRO ADM and Chief Forester of BC. In addition, South Coast Region staff members up to the Director of Resource Management have discussed the strategy and agree with the approach.

The strategy has been discussed with many forest licensees and progress on long-stalled WHA planning, especially in the South Island District, is being made. West Coast Regional FLNRO Staff will ensure WHA planning is consistent with this approach and are committed to fostering and maintaining good working relationships with affected forest licensees.