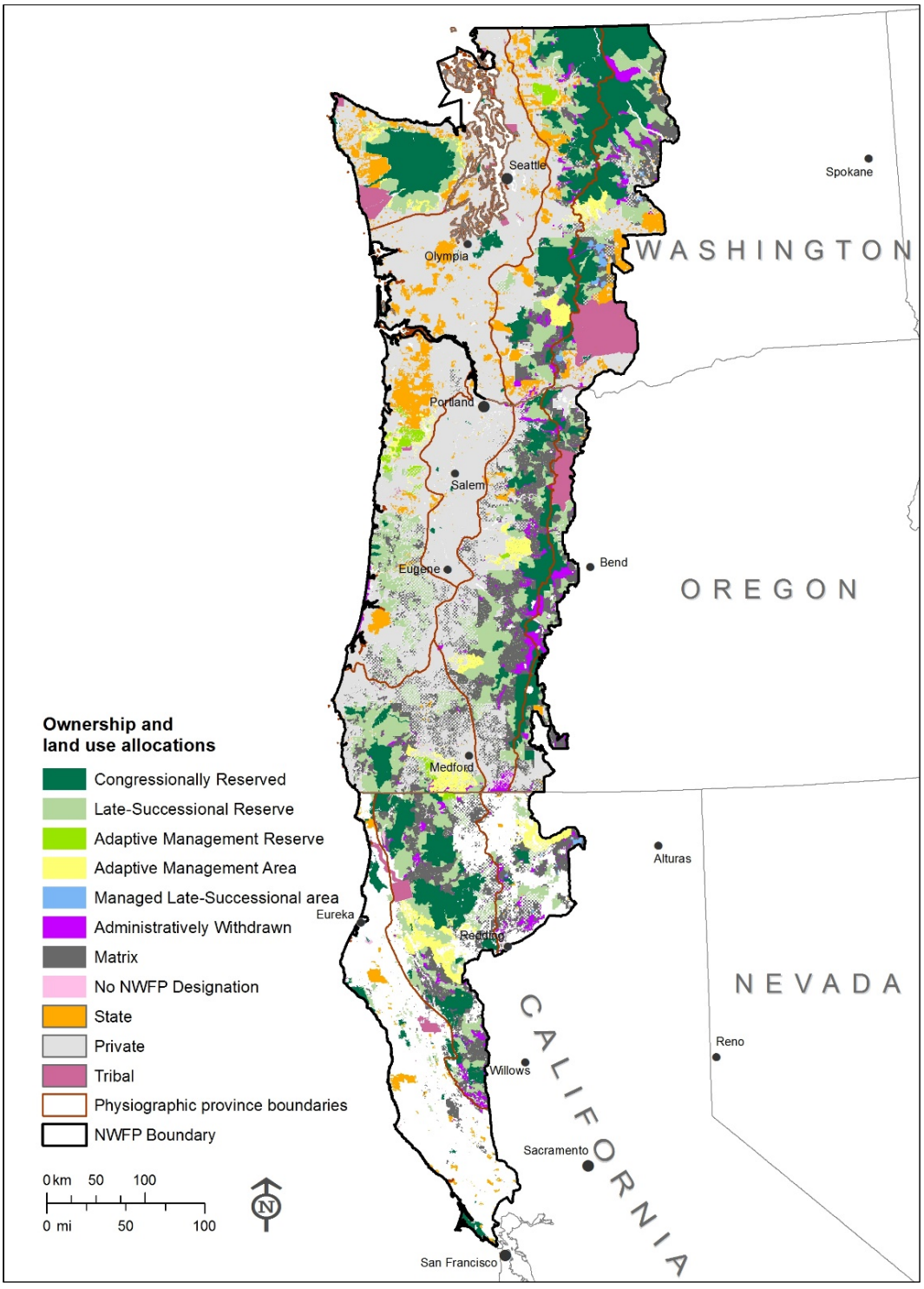
Chapter 4: Northwest Forest Plan Land Use Allocations and Management Direction

Introduction

This chapter addresses broad-scale planning concepts to consider in the Bioregional Assessment of Northwest Forests, including the land allocations described in the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) and relevant management direction. Since enactment of the 1994 NWFP, the landscape within the BioA area has changed and many layers of overlapping and adjacent management direction were developed.[35] The system of reserved areas within the NWFP has been successful in reducing the region-wide loss of old forests, improving watershed health and meeting the objective of protecting old-forest aquatic and wildlife habitats on national forest and grasslands lands. However, the following are issues and needs for change where current land management plan direction within the BioA area does not allow managers to address the ecological needs of the varied and changing landscape or promote the opportunities for restoration-based economic stability.

The basic structure of land use allocation (map 31 and figure 61) has worked well to accomplish the intended goals of the NWFP. Owing to changing environmental conditions in the BioA area—for example, increased fire scope and severity, threats to adjacent lands, and climate change—structural adjustments are needed to enable more responsive and sustainable management across the landscape.

[35] Other management direction within the BioA area includes four region-wide forest plan amendments (three in Oregon/Washington and one in California). These and their relevance to the NWFP modernization are discussed below.



Map 31. Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) land use allocations

For land use allocation descriptions, see figure 61.

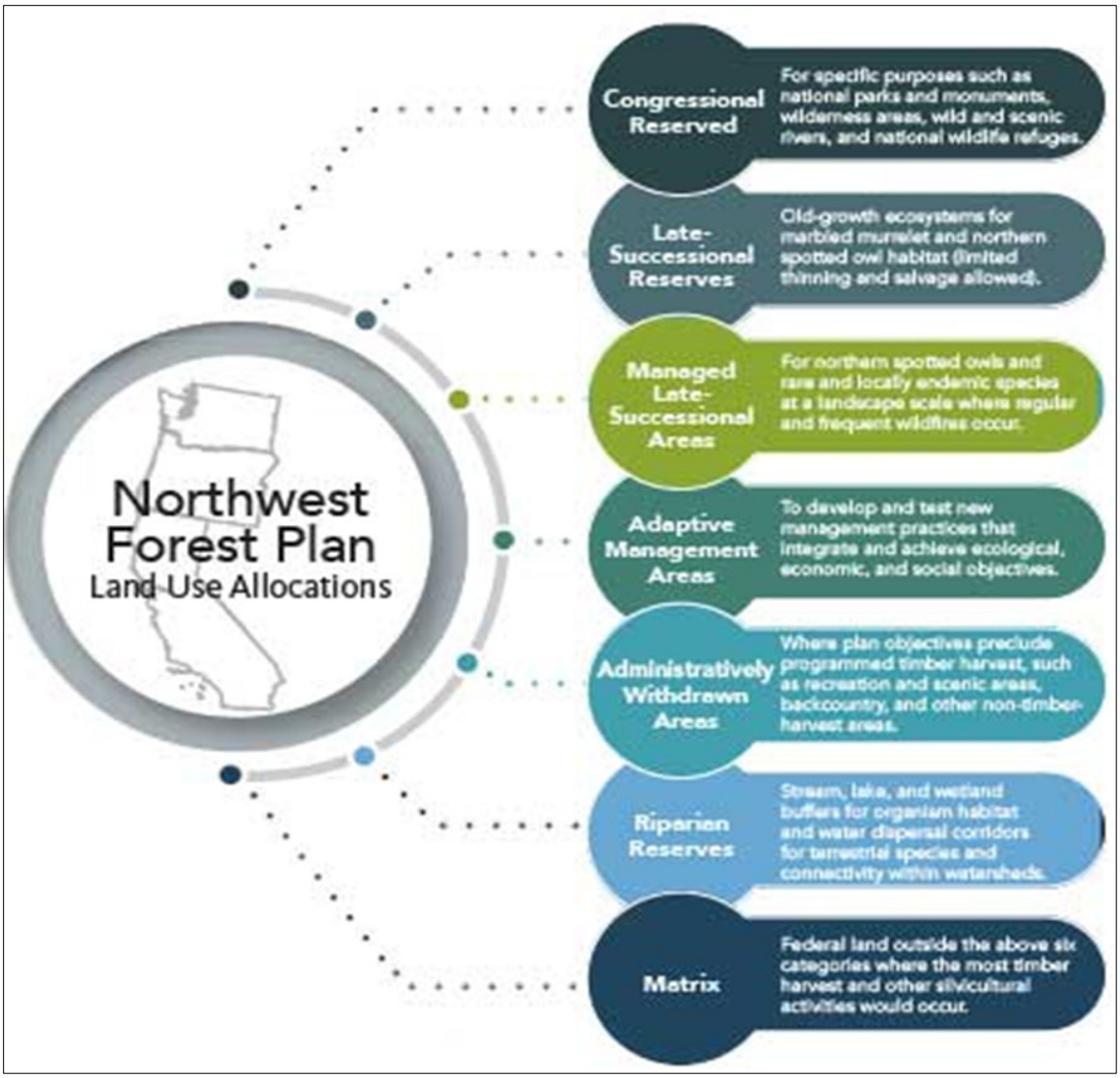


Figure 61. Northwest Forest Plan land use allocations.

Each allocation has specific direction to help ensure consistent management wherever that allocation occurs.

What is Working Well

What is Working Well 1—Late-Successional Reserves

Late-successional reserves were established to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-forest ecosystems and habitat for associated species such as the northern spotted owl and the marbled murrelet. Late-successional reserves overlay a variety of forest vegetation types and fire regimes and incorporate frequent-fire dependent, fire diverse (mixed severity), and fire infrequent ecosystems. Similar management direction applies across all lands within these reserves. Managed late-successional areas are similar to late-successional reserves but are generally located in dry forests. The intent of the NWFP was to allow additional silvicultural and fuels reduction strategies in managed late-successional areas.

Overall, late-successional reserves and managed late-successional areas have been effective in protecting existing dense multi-layered, old-forest habitats across the NWFP area and protecting against further loss of old forests on federal lands. Late-successional reserves have largely met expectations for contributing to the conservation of dense multi-layered old forests and the species that depend on them. late-successional reserves have worked well in combination with other land management designations such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and riparian reserves to provide a network of habitats for fish and wildlife species.

What is Working Well 2—Riparian Reserves

Riparian Reserves implement the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) of the NWFP by overlaying all riparian areas throughout the NWFP area and providing management direction within those riparian corridors; they protect aquatic systems and provide travel corridors to terrestrial species and generally limit management activities within the reserved acreage.

Riparian reserves provide habitat for aquatic and riparian-dependent fish and wildlife species. They protect the integrity of water, providing clean water sources for downstream uses, and serve as connective corridors for multiple species of wildlife.

Riparian management areas have been very effective as a component of the ACS in preventing timber harvest-related degradation of riparian and aquatic habitats. They have frequently served as an effective filter between upland sedimentation and other pollutants and water bodies, protecting aquatic habitat and downstream water resources. Riparian management areas have also effectively protected water and associated riparian areas from solar radiation, moderating water temperatures.

What is Working Well 3—Matrix

The intent of the matrix land use allocation under the NWFP was primarily to support desired and probable timber production goals set forth in the plan, while also interfacing with other land use allocations to sustain old forest and riparian areas. Most of the area where timber has been harvested since 1994 has been in matrix.

Matrix lands have contributed to timber production, old-forest conditions, overall watershed improvement, aesthetic and recreation scenery quality, and other valuable ecosystem services.

What is Working Well 4—Survey and Manage

The survey and manage standards and guidelines have contributed to knowledge of rare and uncommon late-successional and old-forest-dependent species in the NWFP area, despite the shortcomings described under “Key Change Issue 4” of this section. A focus on survey and manage species has contributed to a management shift toward ecological forestry, such as leaving more dead trees, downed wood, and refugia habitat.[36]

[36] In this case, “refugia habitat” refers to habitat that offers protection to a segment of a species’ population in the face of changes on the landscape.

What is Working Well 5—Administratively Withdrawn Areas

Administratively withdrawn areas include areas that were withdrawn from programmed timber harvest by individual forest plans and subsequent administrative decisions; examples include research natural areas, scenic areas, backcountry motorized or non-motorized areas, and inventoried roadless areas. Timber harvest may be allowed in some areas if determined to be an appropriate management tool to meet the purposes and desired conditions of administratively withdrawn areas.

Inventoried roadless areas are a substantial portion of the late-successional old-forest habitats that benefit many fish and wildlife species. Wide-ranging species, such as meso-carnivores, benefit substantially from inventoried roadless areas, as do many aquatic species.

What is Working Well 6—Congressionally Reserved Areas

Congressionally reserved areas are areas that are reserved by congressional designation, including national monuments, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic rivers. Congress has the authority to designate new areas, and significant additions have occurred within the BioA area since the development of the NWFP and other multi-national forest and grassland land management plan amendments.

Congressionally reserved areas continue to provide for a diverse suite of ecosystem services and contribute to the overall recovery of old-forest ecosystems throughout the BioA area. Congressionally reserved areas, such as designated wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, also provide important recreational opportunities for people seeking solitude or adventure.

What is Working Well 7—Land Management Outside the NWFP Boundary and Other Management Considerations in the Bioregional Assessment area

PacFish and InFish have resulted in successful protection of water bodies and adjacent riparian habitat. A broad-scale monitoring program established under the PacFish and InFish Endangered Species Act (ESA) process, commonly referred to as “PIBO” (PacFish/InFish biological opinion), continues to provide valuable monitoring feedback to managers throughout the basins.

The concept of historic range of variability[37] (HRV) as a reference for desired management outcomes is contributing to managing for diverse and resilient landscapes, early-seral forests and open stands of large, old trees in dry forest landscapes. The rate of harvest of late structure and old forests on National Forest System lands has slowed significantly. Habitat and connectivity between habitats for species that prefer dense, multi-structured forest has generally increased under the Eastside Screens and Sierra Nevada Framework.

[37] Historic range of variability is the terminology used in the Eastside Screens. The BioA uses the term natural range of variation to describe essentially the same concept to align with the 2012 Planning Rule. Important considerations regarding the application of historic conditions under changing climate are discussed in Ecological Integrity.

Key Change Issues

Key Change Issue 1—Late-Successional Reserves

Critical habitat that has been designated subsequent to the delineation of late-successional reserves, especially critical habitat for northern spotted owl, does not fully align with designated late-successional reserves; this creates management challenges. As late-successional reserves were initially designated to serve as habitat for northern spotted owl, it would make the most sense if northern spotted owl-designated critical habitat and reserve land use allocations (including congressionally reserved areas such as wilderness, riparian reserve and late-successional reserve) were aligned.

Current late-successional reserve management objectives emphasize dense multi-layered forest structural conditions that in some areas are out of balance with the natural range of variation, especially in frequent-fire dependent forests. Current management constraints of late-successional reserves have limited restoration of natural disturbance regimes to promote ecological integrity[38] and ecological resilience[39] in frequent-fire dependent forests. Direction to protect dense multi-layered, old-forest habitat and retain high levels of dead and down wood in late-successional reserves may conflict with other values at risk or management objectives, on adjacent lands, in developed recreation areas, or for permitted special use infrastructure. Despite being designated differently from late-successional reserves, managed late-successional areas also have primarily been managed like late-successional reserves. Conducting additional silvicultural treatments, including fuel reduction strategies, has generally not been accomplished in managed late-successional areas. Current management in late-successional reserves, except for specific exemptions, requires time-consuming regional and inter-agency review, which can hamper efficiency.

Planning Considerations

Alignment of late-successional reserve with designated critical habitat could simplify management direction, while late-successional reserve management direction that is compatible with the diverse landscapes is needed.

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain and restore ecosystem characteristics and processes by working toward desired conditions that are compatible with the diverse landscapes across the BioA area.

Recommendation 2: Address the dynamic nature of ecosystems to be better positioned to respond to future environmental uncertainties.

Recommendation 5: Prioritize community and firefighter safety in forested areas near communities at risk from wildfires.

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[38] The biological and physical environment that can affect the diversity of plant and animal communities, the persistence of native species, and the productive capacity of ecological systems (36 CFR 219.19).

[39] The quality or condition of an ecosystem when its dominant ecological characteristics occur within the natural range of variation and can withstand and recover from most perturbations imposed by natural environmental dynamics or human influence (36 CFR 219.19).

Recommendation 6: Recognize that fire is a natural process and plays an important role in reducing the risk of uncharacteristic fire and in promoting ecosystem health.

Recommendation 7: Expand the use of timber harvest as a restoration tool to provide economic and social benefits to communities.

Recommendation 8: Shift from single-species management to maintaining and restoring habitat for multiple species to help ensure we are managing our ecosystem to be resilient in the face of future change.

Recommendation 9: Promote active management in plant and animal habitats to restore and promote ecological resilience.

Geographic Considerations

National forests and grasslands with the most fire-dependent plant communities in the eastern Cascades, southern Oregon, northern and northeastern California frequently face conflicts when designing projects to sustain or improve resilient forest conditions because dense, multi-storied stands have more risk of high-severity wildfire on fire-dependent landscapes. Maintenance of existing old forest and maturation of mid-development forest into old forest may continue with the largest gains in the western Oregon Coast Range.

Losses of old forest within late-successional reserves are most evident in fire-dependent ecosystems due to uncharacteristically severe wildfire. The Rogue River-Siskiyou, Okanogan-Wenatchee, Klamath, Shasta-Trinity, Mendocino, and Umpqua National Forests have experienced significant amounts of high-severity fire within late-successional reserves (Davis et al., in progress).

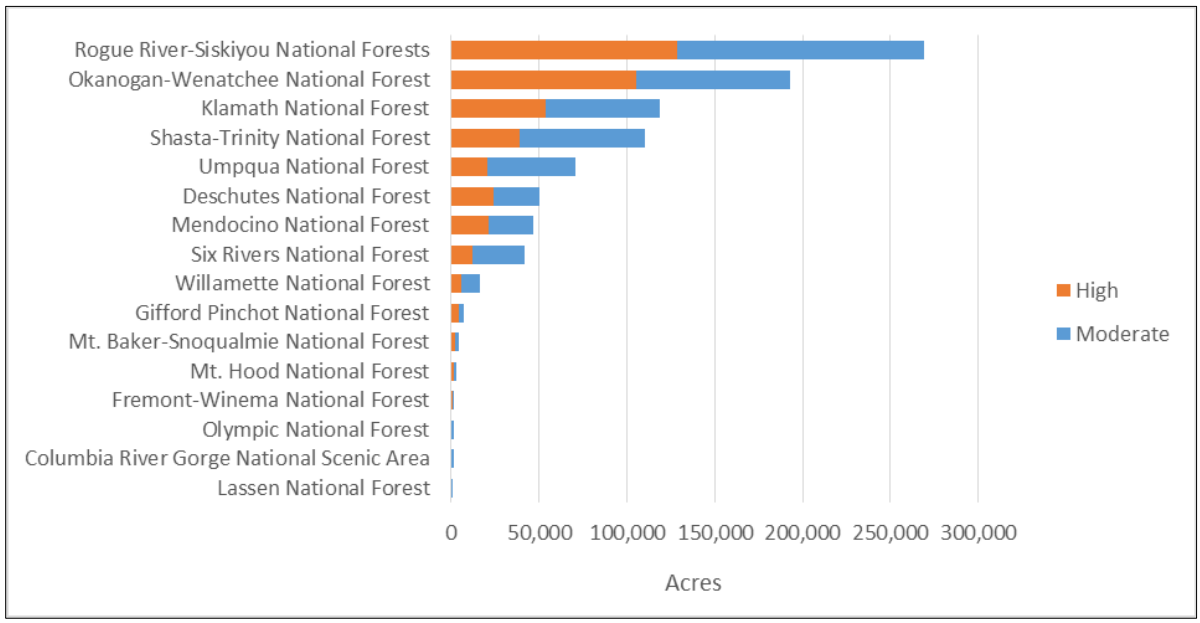

Figure 62. Total acres of moderate- and high-severity fire in late-successional reserve, 1993–2018

In general, national forests and grasslands with the most area in frequent-fire dependent ecosystems are highlighted here as having the most area in moderate- and high-severity fire within late-successional reserves.

Key Change Issue 2—Riparian Reserves and Key Watersheds

Riparian reserves implement the ACS[40] of the NWFP by overlaying all riparian areas in the NWFP area and providing management direction within those riparian corridors. By limiting management activities to those benefitting aquatic and riparian-dependent species, riparian reserves were intended to protect aquatic systems, provide habitat for aquatic and riparian-dependent fish and wildlife species, protect water resources for downstream uses, and provide travel corridors to terrestrial species. Key watersheds provide optimal fish habitat and protect high-quality water sources. Several issues have arisen since the NWFP was developed that need to be addressed:

- The process to complete a watershed analysis, which is required to determine if proposed management activities within riparian reserves and key watersheds are consistent with ACS objectives or for adjustments to riparian reserve boundaries, has been inefficient and lengthy.
- Active management to mimic natural conditions and fire regimes is often avoided in riparian reserves because of stringent standards and guidelines; this may leave these areas vulnerable to uncharacteristic stand-replacement fire.[41]
- Fire is an integral component of functioning aquatic systems, and its absence in some areas has resulted in less than fully functioning systems.

Planning Considerations

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain and restore ecosystem characteristics and processes by working toward desired conditions that are compatible with the diverse landscapes across the BioA area.

Recommendation 3: Update and consolidate the existing aquatic direction processes and analysis requirements.

Furthermore, consider simplifying the requirements for a watershed analysis to increase efficiency and make it easier to keep them up to date.

Adjust the distribution of key watersheds considering designated critical habitat for ESA-listed fish, high intrinsic potential assessments, bull trout core areas, climate change vulnerability assessments, presence of vulnerable non-ESA-listed aquatic species, and refuge areas for ESA-listed aquatic species identified in federal recovery plans.

[40] The ACS-designated buffer zones along in areas where management must focus on maintaining aquatic values, and where roads or logging should receive increased scrutiny to avoid impacts to aquatic species.

[41] It should be noted that the need for active management in riparian areas can be found throughout the NWFP area (Reeves et al. 2018). In this example, active management in riparian areas is most urgent in the frequent-fire dependent ecosystems, but also noted as a need throughout the BioA area.

Add geographic-based descriptions of reference conditions[42] and disturbance regimes[43] and use of mechanical and fire treatments to help guide land management direction.

Geographic Distribution and Regional Trends

Due to the relative density of aquatic and riparian resources, higher percentages of coastal and western Cascade national forests and grasslands are designated as riparian reserves than in eastern Cascades national forests and grasslands or most northern California national forests and grasslands.

National forests and grasslands along the eastern Cascades of Oregon and Washington, southwestern Oregon, and northwest California depend on frequent fire and have high levels of departure from reference conditions. While wildfire is a part of these aquatic systems, the scale of the fires could result in short-term negative consequences on habitat for ESA-listed fish. Native aquatic species in the BioA area have adapted to the effects of fire, particularly if populations are connected, and long-term effects of wildfires are most often beneficial. Benefits include addition of large wood and spawning gravel and renewed, reinvigorated riparian vegetation.

Key Change Issue 3—Matrix

Matrix designation includes all acres (about 4 million) in the NWFP that are not within any other land use allocation. If matrix lands are not in a riparian reserve or affected by other NWFP direction, such as survey and manage or matrix and all land standards and guidelines, then they are managed under guidance in individual land management plans. Timber harvest in matrix lands has resulted in production below the estimated probable sale quantity.[44] One reason for this decline in timber production is that the designation of critical habitat for northern spotted owl incorporated some matrix lands that resulted in conflicting management direction.

Planning Considerations

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain and restore ecosystem characteristics and processes by working toward desired conditions that are compatible with the diverse landscapes across the BioA area.

Recommendation 7: Expand the use of timber harvest as a restoration tool to provide economic and social benefits to communities.

Recommendation 9: Promote active management in plant and animal habitats to restore and promote ecological resilience.

[42] A standard or benchmark against which current conditions are compared.

[43] Cumulative effects of disturbance events across space and time.

[44] Probable sale quantity reflects the acres available for harvest and expected acre yields as well as land management standards and guidelines.

Additional planning considerations include recalculating appropriate timber output values during forest plan revision to better account for contemporary harvest practices, modern desired conditions, and up-to-date harvest restrictions.

Geographic Distribution and Regional Trends

The land management plans on the Gifford Pinchot, Mt. Hood, Willamette, and Umpqua National Forests projected the highest timber outputs under the NWFP, and these forests have experienced significant gaps between projected production and actual output. These are highly productive forests and the timber output does not reflect that potential productivity.

Providing a predictable and sustainable timber supply is a goal of the Forest Service. Implementing restoration and resiliency projects often have timber output as a coproduct.

Key Change Issue 4—Survey and Manage

The survey and manage standards and guidelines apply across all land allocations in the NWFP area. The standards and guidelines, adopted to mitigate the impacts of continued timber harvesting in old forests, requires the Forest Service look for rare and uncommon species before timber harvest or other specific project activities identified by the courts as Pechman exemptions.[45] If these plants or animals are found, they must be protected/buffered or potential impacts must be otherwise avoided or mitigated.

There is a need to update the NWFP's survey and manage program to reflect current science and lessons learned through implementation. Survey and manage is out of step with the multiple coarse-filter species conservation approach, as directed by the Forest Service 2012 Planning Rule. Complexity of direction has made it difficult to conduct the annual species review process, which is required as part of the adaptive management requirement of the survey and manage program. Therefore, changing the status of species has not occurred since 2003. Complex and lengthy survey protocols and requirements for managing known sites have been obstacles to forest management and species protection.

Additionally, the survey and manage program requires region-wide periodic strategic surveys to update the program's species list and make changes to management recommendations. These survey protocols are not implemented as intended and are costly. Even with the positive outcomes of survey and manage stated earlier, several important issues need to be addressed:

- The annual species review is part of the adaptive management design of the survey and manage standards and guidelines, and staffing shortages and complexity of direction have made it difficult to apply. When species are no longer considered rare or uncommon, removing or moving species between categories does not occur or takes a long time.
- Complex and lengthy survey protocols and requirements for managing known sites result in uncertainties and difficulties in designing and implementing forest management activities.

[45] Pechman exemptions: https://www.fs.fed.us/r6/reo/survey-and-manage/documents/sm-fs-correspondence-20140513.pdf.

- Region-wide, periodic strategic surveys to fill information gaps in order to update the survey and manage species list and make changes to management recommendations or survey protocols are costly or not implemented as intended.

Photo 47. The red tree vole is a "survey and manage" species

The red tree vole (Arborimus longicaudus) is an arboreal rodent that lives in the canopies of old-growth Douglas-fir forests. Its range extends south from the Columbia River, west of the Cascades; down to northwestern California and serves as a good indicator of old-forest canopy dynamics.

Planning Considerations

Taking a coarse-filter approach can help us manage for the habitat needs of multiple species, including species that are considered imperiled or vulnerable, while some mitigations for specific rare and uncommon species where limited status information exists and or there are persistence concerns are still needed.

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 8: Shift from single-species management to maintaining and restoring habitat for multiple species to help ensure we are managing our ecosystem to be resilient in the face of future change.

Furthermore, additional Planning Considerations include that in forest plan revision the 2012 planning rule and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 direct the application of species of conservation concern.[46]

[46] A species, other than Federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that is known to occur in the plan area and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long term in the plan area (36 CFR 219.9(c)).

Geographic Distribution and Regional Trends

Within the range of the red tree vole, particularly toward the center of the range (Umpqua and Willamette National Forests), managers often avoid projects in potential habitat due to management constraints, cost and timing of surveys, and potential public controversy.

On national forests and grasslands in the Klamath province where there is a likelihood of survey and manage species, project activities are substantially reduced owing to timing and cost of intensive requirements.

Key Change Issue 5 – Adaptive Management Areas

The NWFP established ten adaptive management areas (about 1.5 million acres), each with its own specific objectives. The intent of the adaptive management areas was to develop and test new management strategies related to ecological and economic management goals. However, adaptive management areas are subject to the same substantive and process regulations and policies as the rest of NWFP lands, constraining experimental design and implementation. Risk aversion and lack of social acceptance by regulatory agencies, environmental interest groups, and the public in general about implementation of experimental design are among several additional reasons adaptive management areas were underused (Stankey et al. 2006). The goal of adaptive management areas was not fully realized.

Work is needed to create more effective processes and to build trust and collaboration that could more successfully integrate adaptive management into land management plans.

Planning Considerations

While our knowledge about national forests and grasslands and the communities that we serve has grown, uncertainties remain. By improving how we integrate future uncertainty into our land management planning direction, we will be better positioned to manage ecosystems in the face of anticipated change.

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 2: Address the dynamic nature of ecosystems to be better positioned to respond to future environmental uncertainties.

Furthermore, universities, other agency research branches, and Forest Service research stations should be involved in land management modernization to determine whether to continue specific adaptive management area objectives.

Key Change Issue 6—Administratively Withdrawn Areas

Administratively withdrawn areas are those that were withdrawn from timber harvest by individual forest plans or subsequent administrative decisions. Examples include research natural areas, scenic areas, backcountry motorized or nonmotorized areas, and inventoried roadless areas. While management activities are not precluded in administratively withdrawn areas or inventoried roadless areas, many management activities may not be analyzed or implemented without regional or national review processes, and the inability to build roads or harvest timber in inventoried roadless areas substantially limits management options in these areas.

Planning Considerations

Designate land use allocations more compatible with inventoried roadless area direction to enable management that is more effective in achieving ecological desired conditions.

Make adjustments to late-successional reserves, matrix, and in some cases, key watersheds to better align with the values and management constraints on inventoried roadless areas.

Key Change Issue 7—Congressionally Reserved Areas

Congressionally reserved areas are reserved by congressional designation, and include national monuments, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic rivers. Congress has the authority to designate new areas, and significant additions have occurred within the BioA area since the NWFP was first implemented. Even with the positive results of congressionally reserved areas described earlier in this section, some things are not working well.

Fire management in congressionally reserved areas is complicated due to restrictions of, and additional requirements for, the use of firefighting tools and techniques. Using prescribed and unplanned fires to meet resource objectives within designated wilderness can be difficult due to collateral impacts to recreation resources and air quality, and limited opportunities to control these fires outside the reserved lands.

Wildfire has burned a larger proportion of the congressionally reserved areas within the NWFP in comparison to matrix, riparian reserves, or administratively withdrawn areas. This is likely due to land management choices to not aggressively suppress wildfire that start in wilderness areas, whereas wildfires in other land use allocations are managed with more aggressive suppression tactics.

Some congressionally reserved areas, especially some popular designated wilderness areas, have become overcrowded with visitors, affecting both the natural environment and opportunities for solitude.

Planning Considerations

Develop management direction to enable the use of prescribed or wildland fire in congressionally reserved areas where the natural role of fire is appropriate.

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendation

Recommendation 6: Recognize that fire is a natural process and plays an important role in reducing the risk of uncharacteristic fire and in promoting ecosystem health.

Geographic Distribution and Regional Trends

Since the establishment of NWFP direction, congressional designations have occurred in Washington, Oregon, and California, with more on some national forests and grasslands or geographic areas than others.

Public engagement in the periodic enactment of congressionally designated areas is evidence of continued commitment and involvement in public land management.

National forests and grasslands closest to population centers, such as the Mt. Hood, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie, Deschutes, Okanogan-Wenatchee, and Shasta-Trinity National Forests, have the greatest challenges regarding the ability to respond to growing and more diverse recreation use and meeting NWFP goals and direction.

Key Change Issue 8—Land Management Outside the Northwest Forest Plan Boundary and Other Management Considerations in the Bioregional Assessment

Approximately 25 percent of the area included in the BioA is not within the footprint of the NWFP. Land management plans have been amended on these acres by several pieces of management direction:

- The Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-Producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (also known as "PacFish"), August 18, 1994.
- The regional forester's Amendment #2 for the Revised Continuation of Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (also known as "Eastside Screens"), June 5, 1995.
- The Inland Native Fish Strategy Environmental Assessment, decision notice, and finding of no significant impact (also known as "InFish"), dated July 28, 1995.
- The Sierra Nevada Framework Amendment (also known as "Sierra Nevada Framework") originally signed on January 12, 2001 and revised in October 2004.

These strategies and amendments along with the NWFP and the underlying land management plans often create conflicting management direction that is complex and inefficient to implement. In the bigger picture, the landscape trends are larger than the boundaries of individual land management plans and regional amendments. Therefore, revisions of the land management plans within the BioA area should recognize the successes and challenges of all management direction within that greater landscape area, with an eye toward integration to facilitate consistency and landscape-level management across and outside of the BioA area. Detailed issues include the following:

- Complicated management of terrestrial and aquatic resources on eastern Cascades national forests and grasslands[47] and northeastern California national forests and grasslands[48] due to the different management direction that applies to different portions of these national forests and grasslands; landscape-level management strategies are difficult to plan and implement.

[47] Okanogan-Wenatchee, Deschutes, Fremont-Winema, and parts of Mt. Hood and Gifford Pinchot National Forests.

[48] Lassen and Modoc National Forests.

- Elements of the Eastside Screens and the Sierra Nevada Framework, including diameter limits for timber harvest (21 inches in the Eastside Screens, 20 inches in the Sierra Nevada Framework) can hamper the ability of managers to meet objectives for natural range of variation, and are often at odds with desired conditions for resilient landscape conditions[49] that were developed by federal land managers, community collaborative groups, and forest researchers using the best available science.
- The mismatch between existing land management plan direction and current landscape conditions resulted in many project-specific plan amendments to meet objectives; amendments can be lengthy and inefficient processes.

Planning Considerations

Refer to BioA Chapter 2 Management Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Maintain and restore ecosystem characteristics and processes by working toward desired conditions that are compatible with the diverse landscapes across the BioA area.

Recommendation 3: Update and consolidate the existing aquatic direction processes and analysis requirements.

The intent of PacFish, InFish and the Eastside Screens was to be interim guidance until clear overarching direction was developed or affected land management plans were revised. Revision efforts should build upon these strategies, while considering landscape-level trends and desired outcomes relative to ecosystem integrity, natural range of variation, fire regimes, and watershed health. Furthermore, integration of management direction to create consistency between the NWFP, PacFish, InFish, the Eastside Screens, and the Sierra Nevada Framework is needed to meet ecological and social objectives.

Modernization Options

Modernization options are outlined at the end of chapter 2 of the BioA. These options are a starting point as the Forest Service engages the public and develops a strategy for updating land management plans across the BioA area. We want to keep and enhance management direction that is working well, but make changes where necessary to meet today's social, economic, and ecological conditions and challenges on our dynamic landscapes. Large-scale management challenges, such as climate change, affect all the national forests and grasslands across the BioA area. Other challenges, including maintenance of spotted owl habitat and maintaining the role of wildfire in frequent-fire dependent ecosystems, are unique to, or more urgent on, individual or several national forests and grasslands. To increase efficiency in land management, it is important for modernization efforts to create consistent direction for universal challenges, but also to develop direction that recognizes and is compatible with diverse ecosystems and communities.

[49] Management recommendations in dry pine and Douglas-fir forests often focus on creation and maintenance of open stands of large trees without the dense understory of shade-tolerant trees that are characteristic of the denser stands preferred by spotted owls.

Potential strategies for modernizing the land management plans in the BioA area include simultaneous plan revision, incremental plan revision, amendments, or some combination of these.

Next Steps

Our 2012 planning rule supports and encourages productive working relationships between the Forest Service and diverse communities, including youth, low-income, and minority populations, and stakeholders, American Indian tribes, and other governments by providing "for a transparent, collaborative process that allows for effective participation" throughout the entire land management planning process.

For several years after finalization of the current planning rule, a small committee of public, state- and local-elected officials, tribes, and youth provided advice and recommendation on implementation of the planning rule. This same committee developed the Citizens Guide to National Forest Planning. In this spirit, we are committed to a participatory collaborative process to accomplish modernization of the existing land management plans. The collaborative effort will bring diverse interests together to explore critical issues and provide meaningful input to our decision process.

Before any formal planning begins, a road map will be provided to inform, engage, and collaborate during each phase of the land management planning process. The Forest Service will also provide tools for gathering and sharing information to keep the public and stakeholders informed and to ensure robust collaboration.

The next step is to reengage with and understand what is important to our customers: the public. Effective engagement will help complete the picture of what we need to be aware of for future planning opportunities. With your participation, we will work together to determine what in the NWFP should be carried forward and what can be improved upon based on new information, today's issues, and what best meets the needs of our diverse communities and stakeholders.

The Forest Service will stay connected and provide the latest information through various channels of communication to make that as easy as possible. Please visit the NWFP Modernization webpage[50] for more information on the meetings and channels of communication and to learn how you can stay engaged.

[50] https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/landmanagement/?cid=stelprd3831710.