



**Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands HCP  
Annual Update to USFWS for 2017 and 2018  
5/2/2019**

**DNRC Missoula – Forest Management Bureau Conference Room  
10:00 am to 2:00 pm  
Final Meeting Notes**

**Present:**

Ben Conard	USFWS
Jeff Schmalenberg	DNRC
Ross Baty	DNRC
Mike Anderson	DNRC
Dan Rogers	DNRC (Lazy-Swift portion)
Gary Frank	DNRC (Lazy-Swift portion)

***MEETING NOTES:***

***Lazy-Swift Acquisition***

- Discussion of the process for adding Lazy Swift and BPA acquisitions into the HCP
  - DNRC will submit a proposal and notification to the USFWS requesting that the process for the amendment to be started in early summer.
  - The amended Transitional Lands Strategy published in the DNRC HCP SEIS will provide guidance to DNRC for the necessary information required in the proposal submitted to USFWS.
  - Likely be looking at a categorical exclusion as the appropriate level of NEPA.
  - DNRC is conducting initial detailed inventory to establish baseline data for stand conditions, roads, road crossings, stream delineation and fisheries. Most collection should be completed by early fall 2019.
  - Begin NEPA process and documentation during the summer of 2019. Data collected during summer and fall 2019 will be incorporated into the document as it becomes available.
- Anticipated timeline for the amendment would likely be 6-8 months once the document is drafted to get through the remainder of the process.
- Acquisition lands would likely involve a new LMA specific to the Lazy-Swift and BPA blocks
  - Creating a new LMA would simplify the accounting process and not require reset baseline data for other LMA's in the Stillwater, creating new boundaries etc.
  - USFWS/DNRC: Adding the lands would require amending the ITP which would require public notification as explained in the amended HCP (Appendix A, p. 49, para. 2). Adding the lands would increase existing protections and improve long-term conservation assurances.



- DNRC indicated that stand polygons are in place currently for acquired lands, and data are currently likely available that would allow us to evaluate total potential habitat for Canada lynx.
- In the process to add the Lazy-Swift lands DNRC would need to amend the Stillwater transportation plan to incorporate acquisition lands and existing roads that are now a part of the Stillwater State Forest.
  - Would be most effective/efficient for Stillwater to be able to manage the entire block as a whole rather than in two distinct pieces regarding temporary road allowances.
- In the relatively near future, DNRC will be exploring rule-making to clean up some necessary measures in ARMs (species status changes, HCP-related changes etc.) Ideally, the Lazy-Swift block would be covered under the HCP to facilitate the development of clear and consistent direction for DNRC's Forest Management Program. Consistent management would be a priority on these lands with or without their inclusion in the HCP. Not having them included would create seams for inconsistency and unnecessary complications for managers.
- Inclusion of two sections acquired in the Wolf Creek drainage (Libby Unit) would also be a part of this amendment.
  - Strong support from USFWS for including these Lazy-Swift and Libby lands.
- Future land acquisitions
  - DNRC could potentially acquire additional blocks adjacent to existing HCP lands and reiterated the desire to make the amendment process as streamlined as possible. The rationale supporting an efficient process is that the HCP will increase protections, conservation commitments and long-term assurances. Disposal of existing HCP parcels is relatively simple and straight-forward. The process for adding lands into the HCP has been more difficult.

### General Update/Overview

- Implementation Overview
  - DNRC planner position to be filled in May 2019. That position will be responsible for updating implementation checklists and implementation manual to incorporate changes that have occurred between implementation of the HCP and 2019. This will improve workflow for the staff and reporting to USFWS.
  - Field reviews will be conducted again in the fall of 2019. The group discussed conducting a field review on the Lazy-Swift acquisition lands, and the second review in the newly acquired Potomac area where considerable remedial work has been done regarding aquatic resources.
    - The tentative plan would be to shoot for reviews during the early portion of October.
  - Exceptions Process
    - Suggested process we would undertake when rare management circumstances arise would mirror that used for the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Agreement. The one we recently completed for a small project on Plains Unit worked well for the



USFWS; suggested keeping the process the same for future exception requests. In subject line of a request memo to the USFWS, DNRC should state "Exception Request" and urgent identifier. As much notice as possible for the USFWS is suggested, and DNRC should plan for a 30-day notification window. Use existing exception form that would provide key, consistent information to the USFWS (i.e., Type of action, dates needed, area affected, duration of activity, circumstances involved in the action, if situation was unforeseen, effects to the species, and offsetting measures that would be applied to minimize effects). USFWS would provide a concurrence memo approving the action when have been addressed sufficiently. **Exceptions would be reported in annual monitoring reports to the USFWS.**

- DNRC indicated its internal policy on exception requests to a minimum to limit excess workload and maintain consistency program direction to land and units offices.
- HCP reporting
  - DNRC/USFWS will evaluate reporting requirements between 5- and 10-year monitoring reports to determine need for reporting on specific commitments that have not been invoked during the first 10 years of the HCP. Specifically, revisit reporting requirements for gravel pit use and development.
- Transitional Lands Overview
  - No new updates. All land disposal and acquisitions to date were summarized in the 5-year monitoring report.
- Changed Circumstances
  - No changed circumstances during 2017 and 2018 occurred.
    - Minimal fire impact on DNRC lands in 2017 and 2018.
    - 2018 flooding neared the trigger for changed circumstances, but the gage stations monitored did not reach 50-year flood stage on scattered lands or 25-year event on blocked lands.
- Special Projects/Monitoring
  - Leah Breidinger's Avian response to old growth maintenance study in the Swan River State Forest. Looked at bird use in treated old growth forest stands. Results not directly related to HCP but help inform management.
  - Continued stream temperature monitoring on lands in the Sula State Forest, Potomac and Chamberlain areas.
- Training
  - Bear video remains a good tool for DNRC staff.
    - Ben would like to review a copy of the video. We will work with him to make sure he has an opportunity to review the content.
  - DNRC will be putting on a spring training for all field staff, much of which will be focused on tools for implementation of the HCP commitments.



### Terrestrial Monitoring Commitments

- Discussed major findings from both 2017 and 2018 reports.
  - Highlighted expedited review of GB-CY4 for added in Plains Unit.
  - Reiterated that lynx total potential habitat acreage will shift slightly based on Stand Level Inventory changes and timber sale updating.
  - DNRC will be inventorying stands soon in the Placid-Seeley Lake LMA to document habitat status following the Jocko Lakes Fire in 2007.
  - No bear encounters in 2017 or 2018, however observations have been increasing.

### Aquatic Monitoring Commitments

- Discussed major findings from both 2017 and 2018 reports.
  - RMZ harvest continues to be minimal due to overlapping resource mitigations.
    - Monitoring of RMZ harvest has generally shown minimal effects of RMZ harvest on LWD, shade, and stream temperature.
  - RMZ stocking levels in the non-stock/seedling-sapling class have continued to be less than 20% in all aquatic analysis units except for the Bitterroot (Sula Fires) and North Fork Flathead (Moose Fire).
    - Recovery into pole timber likely in the North Fork Flathead, will be inventoried in the near-future to determining RMZ management options.
  - Fish connectivity progress is tracking on the 1/6 of the total crossings being replaced on a 5-year basis.
  - Redd trampling field reviews will be completed in 2019, development of corrective actions will begin soon after.
  - Reviewed map (April 30, 2019) depicting progress on road inventory work in DNRC HCP Priority Watersheds through the end of 2018. Well on track to complete required work in allotted time remaining.

### Cooperative Management Response and Exception Process

- Discussed topic of pre-commercial thinning inside the managed portion of the RMZ.
  - PCT not currently addressed under any of the harvest allowances because of wording incorporated in the RMZ descriptions from the SMZ law.
  - Low level of PCT occurrence/implementation across all land offices, probably fewer than 1-2 projects per year.
  - Track in implementation notes and plans, do not need to formalize in a letter to FWS.
  - Maintain thinning spacing less than 14' x 14' to maintain grizzly bear hiding cover and lynx suitable habitat. DNRC hiding cover validation work has demonstrated that effective hiding cover can be maintained for grizzly bears at 14 x 14 spacing.



### Relevant New Science and Climate Change

- Add publications from Weyerhauser on stream temperature monitoring and sediment delivery
- Reviewed several recent published studies on grizzly bears and lynx and their applicability to the HCP. References for these are provided in the 2018 monitoring report.

### Action Items

- Send notification letter to USFWS to initiate amendment process for Lazy-Swift, BPA, and Wolf Creek acquisitions.
- Schedule field reviews for early October.
- Get a copy of the bear video for Ben to review.