



NOAA FISHERIES

West Coast Region

FAQs: NOAA Fisheries Biological Opinion on BLM's Western Oregon Resource Management Plan

Background

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) consulted with NOAA Fisheries on the impacts of its new management program for BLM lands in western Oregon on protected salmon and steelhead. The BLM worked closely with NOAA Fisheries to address concerns for fish and their habitats that are protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). NOAA Fisheries assessed the impacts of the BLM's plan in a document called a biological opinion, which found that the BLM's Resource Management Plan (RMP) provides sufficient protection for threatened and endangered species and habitats under NOAA's jurisdiction.

Has the BLM addressed the concerns NOAA Fisheries previously expressed in response to the draft environmental impact statement on the RMP?

Yes, the BLM worked closely with NOAA Fisheries on the final version of the RMP to address our concerns, with a particular emphasis on protecting the ecological functions that sustain healthy fish habitat. For example, we are confident that the RMP now includes an appropriately landscape level aquatic conservation strategy, uses watershed scale assessment and planning, includes mandatory direction, and reflects a changing climate. We appreciate BLM's responsiveness and efforts to maintain healthy habitat for fish.

How do the safeguards for riparian and fish habitat compare with the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy?

The BLM's RMP continues key elements of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, tailoring them based on new science and information.

Riparian reserves are designed to protect the ecological functions that sustain healthy fish habitat into the future. These include functions such as the protection of water quality through shade and delivery of woody material into streams where it provides refuge for protected fish.

Key watersheds are defined according to their importance to fish, drawing on higher resolution data than was available before, and information about critical habitat. The key watersheds are therefore defined more accurately and with greater precision.

Watershed analysis will include the BLM's compilation of watershed-scale information on aquatic and riparian areas to better identify conditions, risks and restoration activities, and to document ecological processes.

Watershed restoration will combine habitat based intrinsic potential modeling and professional field knowledge to focus restoration efforts in areas deemed likely to have the highest production potential for fish species of interest.

Monitoring will assess both the implementation and effectiveness of the RMP.

Taking into consideration these five elements, NOAA Fisheries is confident that the RMP provides safeguards for fish habitat equivalent to the Northwest Forest Plan's original Aquatic Conservation Strategy and establishes long-term forest management strategies that protect ESA-listed fish and their critical habitat.

How can the RMP provide as much protection if the riparian buffers are only one tree height instead of two as before?

What is most important about the riparian reserves is how well they are managed to protect and support the ecological functions that sustain healthy streams and wetland habitat. NOAA Fisheries worked closely with BLM to ensure ecological functions are effectively protected through a combination of riparian buffers and other management direction focused on protecting listed fish and their critical habitats.

Are you concerned the RMP does not have as much land in designated riparian reserves as the Northwest Forest Plan did?

The most important purpose of the riparian reserves is to maintain the ecological processes that sustain healthy riparian habitat, and we concluded that the current strategy will accomplish that. While the acreage specifically in riparian reserves may be less, the total amount of land in reserves under the RMP will increase by 11 percent over the Northwest Forest Plan.