

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Candidate Species and Species of Conservation Concern—Wildlife

Desired Condition

The amount, characteristics, and successional stages of plant associations provide terrestrial wildlife habitats that are spatially and temporally present across the Forests. The availability and distribution of terrestrial wildlife habitats maintains viable native wildlife species, providing for reproduction, security, forage, dispersal, shelter, and territorial needs. Wildlife habitat sufficiently distributed to be resilient and adaptable and support threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate (TEPC) species, species of conservation concern (SCC), and other wildlife species.

Populations of TE wildlife species trend toward recovery through cooperation and coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State agencies, other federal agencies, tribes, and interested groups.

Old forest habitats are resilient and adaptable to existing and potential future stressors, such as climate change. These habitats have the capacity to maintain natural ecosystem function and provide a resilient carbon pool on the land base that is both suitable and unsuitable for timber production. The average percentage of old forest in a geographic area varies over time; however, the total percentage of old forest is within the natural range of variability (NRV). Vegetation provides for diverse habitats across the forest landscape. Old forest habitats are well represented in upslope and riparian settings in amounts and distribution that provide connectivity for wildlife species and for ecological processes to move across the landscape. Wide-ranging species are able to move freely across and between habitats, allowing for dispersal, genetic interaction, and species recruitment.

Forest patches occur in sizes and distribution consistent with the NRV and provide attributes appropriate for species associated with old forest. (Old forest is described in section XX, XXXX, of the Assessment and in XX Plan components.)

Structurally complex habitat exists throughout forested portions of the Forests. Wildlife species associated with snag habitat find large diameter snags and logs, fallen branches, and other forms of coarse woody debris, as well as areas with thick leaf-litter. Large, old, decadent trees are distributed throughout the landscape on lands suitable and unsuitable for timber production and in riparian ecosystems. The amount of large snags and down wood is sufficient to support snag and down-wood dependent or associated species and to protect and enhance soil productivity. Snag retention occurs in patches or individually to accommodate safety concerns.

Uncommon habitat elements (e.g., mineral licks, talus slopes, fractured wet bedrock, rocky outcrops, caves, waterfalls, geologic inclusions) are present to support and ensure persistence of wildlife populations associated with these uncommon habitat elements.

Riparian habitats have a high ecological function and include key structural attributes and support the expected riparian wildlife species, including mountain quail, neotropical migratory birds, and bats.

High-elevation grasslands have a high ecological function and include key structural attributes to support grassland and wildlife species associated with dry meadows.

Forest stand characteristics provide microhabitat and microclimate conditions capable of supporting species diversity.

Noxious weeds are not present at a scale that prevents wildlife populations from sustaining desired abundance and distribution.

Human-caused disturbances, including motorized access, do not affect environments at a scale and frequency that prevent wildlife populations from attaining desired distribution and abundance. Human-caused disturbances do not threaten overall wildlife persistence or the quality and availability of habitats in the planning area.

Forest management contributes to wildlife movement within and between disparate National Forest System (NFS) land parcels. Movement between NFS parcels separated by other ownerships is facilitated by managing the NFS portions of linkage areas identified through interagency cooperation.

Species-Specific Desired Condition

Peregrine falcons find secure nest sites and an abundance of forestland birds and small mammals to support their current and expanding population on the Forests.

Neotropical and other migratory birds find productive plant communities with a mosaic of successional stages, structures, and species that support nesting activities or use during their migration across the Forests.

Caves, mines, and snags with loose bark provide areas for roosting, hibernation, or maternity sites for various species of bats. Caves and mines closed for safety are still accessible to bats. Where possible, old structures that are important for maternity roosts and hibernacula are stabilized and conserved. State and federal agencies, tribes, and other organizations partner with the Forest Service to survey and map bat hibernacula, roosting sites, and other special features, and numbers of bats associated with them.

Habitat supports ungulates (elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goats), furbearers, black bear, mountain lion, and wolf to meet Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) species management plan objectives, and IDFG species management objectives are considered in Forest management.

Bighorn sheep populations are sustained with sufficient distribution to be resilient and adaptable throughout core herd home range habitat.

Pacific fir/yew plant communities and timbered areas with 100-year-old or older yew-wood thickets are present in size and distribution necessary to provide moose winter habitat.

On breaklands, preferred browse <15 years old occurs on mapped elk winter range consistent with the vegetative NRV.

High-quality home ranges and dispersal habitat for forest carnivores, such as fisher, marten, and wolverine, are distributed across the landscape in a pattern that allows for movement and dispersal necessary for foraging, reproduction, and genetic interaction.

The forest continues to be a stronghold for fisher, with large, contiguous blocks of forest cover consisting of old forest, abundant snags and large logs, intact riparian areas, low road densities, low overall human disturbance, and connectivity to unoccupied habitats.

Areas of bark beetle activity (≥ 500 acres) provide foraging habitat for American three-toed woodpecker.

Riparian shrublands provide habitat for mountain quail in historic ranges.

Objectives

Following Plan approval, manage XX acres of mid-seral forest to develop late-seral forest habitat conditions consistent with desired conditions described in the terrestrial section.

Standards

Assumption in standard development: All projects comply with requirements of the Endangered Species Act and their implementing regulations as well as other applicable federal and State laws and Forest Service policy (FSM 2670). Canada lynx habitat will be managed in accordance with the Northern Rocky Lynx Management Direction (2007) and ROD, and any amendments, updates, or new direction forthcoming.

Bat friendly closures shall be installed when closing mines or caves, unless surveys indicate bats are not present or habitat is unsuitable.

Buildings shall be inspected prior to removal or demolition to identify bat use. When bats are present, buildings shall not be disturbed until bats have left for the season or have been removed.

Caves used as Townsend's big-eared bat roosts shall be closed to recreational use when bats are present, using signs, road closures, and bat gates.

Activities generating loud or continuous noise (e.g., timber harvest, road construction, hauling, blasting, traffic) shall be restricted during the periods shown on Table X within the distances or areas listed for each species. Restrictions may be waived if the area is not occupied or reproduction has failed, as determined by standardized protocol.

Prescribed fire shall not be used in mountain quail habitat from April 30 to August 1.

All new fencing and fence repairs shall meet big game permeable specifications as described in *Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences* (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2008) (Appendix Z).

Snags and logs will be actively recruited from live trees to increase the representation of old-forest structures (snags and logs) (as per Green et al. [2011]) in mid-seral stands and in old forests where snags and logs are at a low density or are absent.

Goshawk_nest sites will be protected and post-fledgling areas should be managed according to regional guidance (Appendix Y).

Guidelines

Uncommon habitat elements, such as calcareous outcroppings, talus slopes, springs and seeps, and other attributes described in Table XX, should not be disturbed unless SCC are demonstrated to not be present or BMPs are available and will be used to mitigate the disturbance.

Patches of undisturbed habitat should be retained within vegetation management areas to provide islands of habitat, food, and protection from microclimatic extremes and to support post-disturbance dispersal and recolonization of wildlife.

In areas where vegetation management occurs, large diameter snags (>20 inch DBH, or the largest available appropriate for the habitat type) and trees for replacement snags, should be retained as a component of treatment areas. Logs of sufficient size should be retained on the ground for small mammals and other wildlife species that utilize such material as habitat and to provide woody material for nutrient cycling (per Bollenbacher, et al.).

Early seral cottonwood/willow stands should be managed for development of old riparian forest habitat conditions.

In mesic, mixed-conifer, old-forest habitats, when fuel reduction is necessary or desirable, fuels should be removed to create or sustain a mosaic of vertical and horizontal structure (e.g., understory vegetation, snags, logs) characteristic of old forest wildlife habitat. (*Barry needs review edits*)

Prescribed fire, timber harvest, and thinning should be used in late-seral forest to change forest composition and structure to reduce risk of stand replacement wildfires and loss of large, emergent trees and overstory trees to benefit wildlife.

Understory thinning and prescribed burns should be used to enhance development of ponderosa pine old forests and to reduce fuel loads. When prescribed fire is used to maintain old ponderosa pine, underburns should be used to mimic low- to mixed-severity events.

Watershed restoration should focus on watersheds that depart greatly from succession-disturbance regimes, do not contain susceptible populations of species of high conservation concern, and are at high risk of loss of habitat function.

Thirty percent of X-size analysis units (e.g., 5th code HUC) should be maintained for elk security to benefit elk and other wildlife. Larger security areas, to be determined at the project level, should be provided in critical habitat (e.g., elk calving areas) or where elk management is a high priority as determined through coordination with IDFG. Wildlife security areas are described as at least 250 acres in size and are located more than 0.5 miles away from open motorized routes; however, the size and distribution of security areas can be modified by terrain, topography, and vegetative condition.

Winter motorized access on elk winter range may be restricted on an as-needed basis during severe winters at the recommendation of IDFG.

Unburned areas on dry, south-facing slopes should be retained and low-intensity burns should be used at fire-return intervals of X to X years.

Insecticide use should be avoided in bat nursery colonies. Biological controls or spot pesticide treatments should be used in known bat roosting and concentrated foraging areas.

In salvage-logged, post-fire, ponderosa pine forests, snags should be retained in clumps rather than evenly spaced, leaving both hard and soft decay classes to lengthen the time that those stands are suitable for nesting by White-headed and Lewis' woodpeckers.

Forested stands should be retained within eagle nesting territories, especially in areas between known nest sites and the adjacent water body (Appendix X [bald eagle management guidelines]).

Management activities should not result in the loss of existing bald eagle nest trees or established roost sites.

Management activities should avoid impacts to bald eagles on known occupied roost sites, including known winter communal roost areas (Appendix X [bald eagle management guidelines]).

Mature and old trees susceptible to bark beetle infestations, disease, and heart rot, or in the early stages of decay should be retained where suitable nesting and foraging trees are underrepresented in American three-toed woodpecker habitat.

In fisher habitat, slash and cull logs should be retained and distributed across treatment areas to substitute for down logs over the short term. (Criteria for the number, distribution and characteristics of retained slash/culls should be available from ongoing research before the Plan is completed.)

In fisher habitat, regeneration harvest prescriptions should provide for clumpy leave tree distribution. Leave trees should be reserved to provide fisher habitat components.

Closed or abandoned roads should be treated (e.g., revegetated, brushed, obliterated) as soon as practical to provide for wildlife security and dispersal.

Road construction should be avoided within late-seral forests. Roads should be obliterated or use restricted after timber harvests and other management activities.

Riparian mountain quail habitat should be conserved or improved by restoration of natural stream flows and riparian vegetation through control of livestock grazing, and through restrictions on roads and motorized trails in RCAs.

Suitability

Bighorn sheep core herd home ranges are not suitable for domestic sheep or goat grazing or trailing or for goat packing.

Motorized over-snow travel is not suitable in mountain goat winter range.

Motorized access is not suitable in elk calving areas from May 1 to September 15.

Other Management Direction

Within 1 year of Plan approval, biennially update appropriate NRIS database modules for TEPC species and SCC and their habitats to incorporate the latest field data.

Within 5 years of Plan approval, develop guidelines for methods and criteria for the Forestwide evaluation of habitats for wildlife species of interest, TEPC species, and SCC.

Within 5 years of Plan approval, identify and/or develop habitat capability models for assessing the impacts of proposed management actions on wildlife. The models will be reviewed biennially and revised if needed.

Within XX years of Plan approval, develop a mid-scale (forest) assessment of landscape departure patterns from historic succession-disturbance regimes.

Provide a management prescription to reduce potential impacts for bat summer roosts and hibernacula.

Within XX years of Plan approval, identify mid-seral forests in the lower montane community in the Lower Clark Fork ERU that could be brought to late-seral conditions to compensate for late-

seral lower montane forests that been eliminated in these areas.

Within XX years of Plan approval, develop an integrated long-term strategy to re-pattern forest and forest-range landscape mosaics at the watershed scale using mid-scale (forest) strategies. This long-term strategy will consider historical patterns and biophysical succession-disturbance regimes

Within XX years of Plan approval, identify and map younger cottonwood willow stands for protection and development of old forest conditions.

Within XX years of Plan approval, develop guidelines for snag recruitment in unburned forests.

Within XX years of Plan approval, identify and map areas where mature and old trees are underrepresented on the Forest.

Species-Specific Other Management Direction

Within XX years of Plan approval, identify areas that are highest priority for retention and restoration of boreal owl habitat on the Forest where a reduction in the extent of source habitat has increased the isolation of remaining habitat patches.

Within XX years of Plan approval, identify and map potential species strongholds for the long-term management of fisher on the Forest.

Within XX years of Plan approval identify representative stands of old forests for retention and mid-successional stands for development into old-forest stands. Priority should be given to large blocks having high interior-to-edge ratios and few large openings.

Within XX years of Plan approval, partner with State and federal agencies, tribes, or other organizations to survey and map bat hibernacula, roosting sites, and other special features, and numbers of bats associated with them.

Caves, mines, and abandoned bridges and buildings should be surveyed for the presence of roosting bats before permitting recreational use and conducting management activities. If bats are present, disturbance should be avoided until they have left or have been removed.

Sites known to contain roosting bats should be protected from disturbance or destruction. Buffers should be used to protect sites to maintain microclimate conditions and drainage patterns needed by bats. The size of buffers and types of activities allowed within the buffers should be developed based on site-specific conditions. Construction of roads and rights-of-way should not cause siltation, slumping, or water run-off to enter cave habitats or alter other roosting structures.

Levels of human activities around known bat roosts should be restricted using road management, signs, public education, and bat gates.

Management Strategies

None

Partnership Opportunities

None

Coordination Opportunities

None