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Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program State Plan

2006 - 2007



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Objectives | 1 |
| Wildlife Priorities | 2 |
| Partnership Involvement | 3 |
| Ranking Criteria | 5 |
| Quality Assurance | 5 |
| Program Delivery | 6 |
| Appendix 1 (Practices) | 6 |
| Appendix 2 (Cost share rates) | 6 |
| Appendix 3 Action Plan 2007 | 6 |



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WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

OREGON STATE PLAN FY2006

INTRODUCTION:

The State Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Plan addresses the implementation and the administration of the program and serves as a basis for allocating WHIP funds in Oregon. The objectives and priorities identified in this plan help facilitate the creation, restoration and enhancement efforts of key wildlife habitats and targeted species in the state. The plan places a major emphasis on wildlife habitats of national and state significance, threatened and endangered species, and habitats of local concern. The locally led process and the collaboration between local, state, and federal wildlife partners assisted in the development of this plan and in identifying wildlife habitat concerns throughout Oregon.

WHIP has been reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) and is administered by the NRCS. WHIP is a voluntary program that encourages the creation, restoration, and enhancement of wildlife habitats that support animal populations of national, state, tribal, and local significance on private lands. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to assist in developing upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property. The program is a cost share program and is available on private and tribal lands.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of WHIP is to enhance and restore aquatic and upland wildlife habitats that have been impacted by cultural activities. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has developed the "Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy" for Oregon. This document will be used as guidance to facilitate the objectives of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program in Oregon. The objectives of the State WHIP plan include:

- Partnering with local, state, and federal wildlife organizations to inform and educate the public on the diversity of wildlife habitats and the importance of restoring these habitats where economically feasible.
- Focus enhancement and restoration efforts in areas that will address critical habitat needs for wildlife in coastal estuaries and salt marsh, streams and rivers, riparian and flood plain, wetlands, native and wet prairie, grasslands, oak woodlands and savanna, shrub/steppe, and mixed coniferous - alpine riparian habitats (*habitat listing is not in priority order*).
- Emphasize wildlife habitat restoration and management that will directly impact threatened and endangered species, species at risk and species of concern.

Meeting the objectives of this plan will enhance and sustain aquatic and upland native habitats critical for aquatic, terrestrial, and plant species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) or as species of concern in Oregon.

WILDLIFE PRIORITIES:

The WHIP priorities for Oregon are:

- Enhancement and restoration of upland habitats and plant communities (Grasslands, oak savanna, and sage shrub/steppe), and aquatic habitats.
- Enhancement and restoration of habitats for threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and state species listed as species at risk and species of special concern.
- Wildlife habitats and wildlife species that the basins have identified as high priorities through the local working group based on ODFW Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

The restoration and enhancement of native plant communities is the cornerstone of achieving diverse wildlife habitats. Special emphasis will be placed on wildlife habitats that serve multiple species and are critical to threatened and endangered species and species of concern. The basin work group will identify at risk habitats or conservation opportunity areas using the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and utilize the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and other partnering sources to address and improve these critical habitats.

Federal and state agencies and organizations have identified similar wildlife priorities as identified below:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are currently identifying “focus areas” and developing a state wildlife prioritization plan for the *Partners for Wildlife Program*. This document will complement the NRCS state WHIP plan by identifying critical habitats and prioritizing restoration projects through out the state. Both the State WHIP Plan and USFWS habitat prioritization plan utilize similar information to identify critical habitat types, habitats of concern, T&E species and species of concern for restoration projects.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) currently are administering a wildlife tax incentive program and a riparian tax incentive program in some counties in Oregon. These programs target the development and management of wildlife habitats on private lands. NRCS is coordinating with ODFW to utilize these programs and the Access and Habitat, and the Landowner Incentive Programs to develop and implement wildlife habitat projects. Also, ODFW has developed a statewide strategy for upland and aquatic habitats which provides guidance to basins in identifying fish and wildlife priorities. The strategy can be found at:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/document_pdf/b-habitat.pdf and
http://www.dfw.state.or.us/conservationstrategy/document_pdf/c-appendices.pdf.

The NRCS 2003-2007 West Region Strategic Plan identifies wetlands and other aquatic habitats, riparian areas, forests, and grazing lands as critical habitats that sustain healthy fish and wildlife populations. The West Region Strategic Plan action items will complement the Oregon State WHIP Plan, and include the following:

- Completion of Ecological Site Descriptions to provide a foundation for conservation planning that would include fish and wildlife management opportunities, and to identify habitat restoration opportunities.
- Enhance public support for increasing the capacity of NRCS to provide direct service to cooperators for habitat improvement.
- Coordinate all programs benefiting fish and wildlife habitat development, restoration, and management through partnership agreements between stakeholders, responsible state and federal agencies, and NRCS in each state.

PARTNERSHIP INVOLVEMENT

Through the local and basin work groups, as well as the Oregon Technical Advisory Committee, NRCS obtains information from partners on wildlife issues identifying critical habitat areas, establishing educational and outreach needs, and promoting resources from wildlife partners to achieve the local, basin and state objectives for maintaining, enhancing, and restoring wildlife habitats in Oregon. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts play a vital role in obtaining landowner input through the locally led process and NRCS administers the financial cost share portion of the WHIP program.

Federal Partners:

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. USFWS provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). Financial assistance through the *Partners for Wildlife Program* is available to assist landowners in the implementation of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) - Involvement includes information and education to landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. NMFS provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in the development of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - Involvement includes information and education about WHIP to landowners. BLM provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in the development of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) - Involvement includes information and education about WHIP to landowners. USFS provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in the development of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). Financial assistance through the USFS funds is available to assist landowners in the implementation of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP).

Farm Services Agency (FSA) - Involvement includes information and education about WHIP. FSA provides information to landowners in county newsletters and during USDA landowner meetings throughout the year.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) - Involvement includes providing technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

State Partners:

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. SWCD's provide technical assistance to NRCS field offices by identifying potential WHIP projects and in the development and implementation of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). Financial assistance through various grant sources has been available to assist landowners in the implementation of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan.

Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) - Involvement includes information and education about WHIP through newsletters to members.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) - Involvement including financial assistance through OWEB grants has been available to assist landowners in the implementation of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. ODFW provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). A working agreement between ODFW and NRCS within each basin is encouraged to promote efficient and effective working relations in implementing WHIP projects. Financial assistance through *Access and Habitat Program (A&H)*, *Landowner Incentive*, and *State Wildlife Grant Programs* have been available to assist landowners in the implementation of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. ODF provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Department of State Lands (DSL) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. DSL also provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Other Partners:

Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to tribal members interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. The Warm Springs Tribe also provides technical assistance in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Ducks Unlimited (DU) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. DU promotes WHIP at chapter meetings and through local news articles. Members identify projects where partnering can occur and mutual benefits can be obtained. Financial assistance through various grants and chapter funds is available to assist landowners in the implementation of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP).

Pheasants Forever - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. Pheasants Forever promotes WHIP at chapter meetings and through local news articles. Members will identify projects where partnering can occur and mutual benefits can be obtained. Financial assistance through various grants and chapter funds is available to assist landowners in the implementation of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation promotes WHIP at chapter meetings and through local news articles. Members identify projects where partnering can occur and mutual benefits can be obtained. Financial assistance through various grants and chapter funds is available to assist landowners in the implementation of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) - Involvement includes information, education, and outreach to private landowners interested in maintaining and enhancing wildlife habitats. TNC provides technical assistance to NRCS field offices in developing Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). When the objectives for a potential project are mutually beneficial to TNC and NRCS, the organizations explore partnering efforts; funding for projects has been available.

Oregon wildlife interest groups – Defenders for Wildlife, Native Plant Society of Oregon, Green Land Trust, Sierra Club, Oregon Natural Heritage, Deschutes River Conservancy, Watershed Councils, City of Portland, City of Troutdale, Multnomah Drainage District, and Portland Metro all have provided technical or financial assistance in the development or implementation of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP). These wildlife groups have provided financial assistance available for partnering on wildlife projects.

RANKING CRITERIA

The ranking criteria for the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program will be based on national, state and local issues. NRCS will develop the national wildlife issue for the nation. The Oregon Technical Advisory Committee (OTAC) and assistance from wildlife partners will provide guidance to NRCS Oregon in the development of the State wildlife issues. The Basins will develop their local wildlife issues, which will be based upon their critical wildlife priorities and opportunities using the Oregon Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as guidance. The ranking criteria will be posted to the Oregon NRCS website (www.or.nrcs.usda.gov) for public review.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance for WHIP and the development of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) will be conducted in accordance with the:

- . • Conservation Programs Manual, Part 517, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
- . • State Quality Assurance Plan
- . • General Manual Title 450, Part 407
- . • General Manual Title 330, Part 404
- . • General Manual Title 420, Part 401
- . • General Manual Title 120, Part 404
- . • National Planning Procedures Handbook
- . • Field Office Technical Guide

Status reviews will be conducted annually by NRCS field office staff on active WHIP contracts to determine progress in applying the WHDP, condition of installed practices, need for technical assistance or cost share agreement revision, and status of operation and maintenance of installed practices.

The landowner is responsible for the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the conservation practice life span. Operation and maintenance will be conducted in compliance with the National Operation and Maintenance Manual, 180-V-part 500 and Section 4 of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS

Field Offices:

NRCS will follow the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) when treating wildlife land. NRCS field staff will use an approved wildlife habitat assessment procedure (i.e., Biology Technical Note 27, 99 and/or 12) to obtain baseline and applied conditions. Baseline wildlife habitat assessments will be completed during the development of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP). Status reviews will be conducted annually by NRCS field office staff on active WHIP contracts to determine progress in applying the WHDP, condition of installed practices, need for technical assistance or cost share agreement revision, and status of operation and maintenance of installed practices. The following information will be collected:

1. Maintenance of previously applied practices.
2. Comparison of planned and actual conditions.
3. Evaluation of the wildlife habitat quality as compared to baseline conditions.
4. Photographs of contracted areas in conjunction with monitoring activities.

NRCS field offices will report baseline and applied wildlife conditions in the Performance Results System (PRS) to account for wildlife habitat treated in each county.

State Office:

The State will develop a performance measurement and accountability system, which will track the general location, extent and types of wildlife habitats developed through WHIP as well as progress of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP). Tracking information will be conducted in accordance with the Conservation Programs Manual, Part 517, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, 517.12 e.

PROGRAM DELIVERY

Program delivery will include education, information and outreach through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts using the locally led process. The local work groups are responsible for identifying wildlife habitat priorities at the local level, obtain consistency with the Oregon Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy and provide a mechanism for partners to promote and implement WHIP.

APPROVED PRACTICE LIST – (Appendix 1)

Practices listed are eligible for cost sharing at a 50 percent cost share level. Management components within practices like crop residue use and Upland Wildlife Management, although typically needed in a Resource Management System (RMS), will not be eligible for cost sharing under WHIP.

APPROVED PRACTICE COST LIST – (Appendix 2)**WHIP ACTION PLAN – (Appendix 3)**