



October 11, 2018

Mr. Todd Welker
Department of Natural Resources
Southeast Region Manager
713 Bowers Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926-9301

Re: Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Long-term Conservation Strategy for the Marbled Murrelet

Dear Reviewing Officer Welker:

In prior testimony to the Board of Natural Resources, AFRC has expressed concern about the lack of fiscal and economic impact analysis provided by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in connection with the alternatives described in the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) on the Long-term Conservation Strategy (LTCS) for the Marbled Murrelet. AFRC suggested that the public meetings on the RDEIS would benefit from the distribution of a fiscal and economic impact analysis and recommended that those meetings be postponed until the public had an opportunity to review that information. DNR declined to postpone the meetings and has not yet provided a fiscal and economic impact analysis on the alternatives in the RDEIS.

As the comment period on the RDEIS nears its end (November 6), we are concerned that the RDEIS is incomplete and inadequate without a discussion of the economic impacts of the various alternatives. As DNR has heard from AFRC and other stakeholders, the LTCS alternatives would have significant financial and economic impacts on trust beneficiaries who depend upon revenue from timber sales for their day-to-day operations. Without necessarily disagreeing with this conclusion, DNR has apparently determined that the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) does not require this fiscal and economic analysis be included in the RDEIS. We urge DNR to reconsider this conclusion.

The SEPA regulations require that an EIS describe “the existing environment that will be affected by the proposal.” WAC 197-11-440(6)(a); *see also* WAC 197-11-430(2), (4)(d). “Elements of the environment” is a term defined in WAC 197-11-444 and includes, among other elements, “public services and utilities,” “fire,” “police,” “schools,” “parks,” “maintenance” and “other governmental services or utilities.” *See also* RCW 43.21C.110(1)(f). An EIS must “provide impartial discussion of significant environmental impacts.” WAC 197-11-400(2).

Further, an EIS “shall serve as the means of assessing the environmental impact of proposed agency action, rather than justifying decisions already made.” WAC 197-11-402(10). To the

extent that information on significant adverse impacts can be obtained, “agencies shall obtain and include the information in their environmental documents.” WAC 197-11-080(1).

The LTCS alternatives will impact each of the referenced elements of the environment. Beneficiaries of DNR’s timber sale program include schools, hospitals, fire districts, libraries, and other public entities that provide critical government services. Recently, the Timberland Regional Library, a beneficiary of DNR’s timber sale program, announced that budget shortfalls may result in closing library branches including the Hoquiam Library. The Library’s budget shortfall was no doubt impacted by a significant decline in revenue it received from DNR timber sales, which declined from \$6 million per year to less than \$2 million per year.

The LTCS alternatives are likely to have similar impacts on fire districts, school districts, park districts and other governmental agencies and utilities throughout Washington that may result in the curtailment of governmental services. A discussion of these impacts *in the EIS* is clearly required by SEPA. The failure to address these in the RDEIS is not consistent with the purpose of an EIS, which is to “enable[] government agencies and interested citizens to review and comment on proposed government actions. ...” WAC 197-11-400(4).

While AFRC shares DNR’s interest in completing the LTCS expeditiously, the absence of a fiscal and economic impact analysis in this RDEIS is inconsistent with requirements of SEPA, may lead to a legally inadequate EIS, and undermines the ability of the public to meaningfully participate. Such legal vulnerabilities could further delay the completion of the LTCS. AFRC requests that DNR act immediately to extend the comment period on the RDEIS to a date that is at least 45 days after a fiscal and economic impact analysis is released to the public that outlines the impacts to local economies and beneficiaries, including junior taxing districts.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Travis Joseph
President/CEO
American Forest Resource Council

CC: Hilary Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands
Board of Natural Resources