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Dear Participants:

Re: Report on - File 050637 / Bonanza Harvesting

In April 2005, the Sierra Club's Haida Gwaii Group filed a complaint regarding development within the Bonanza Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) and concern for the management of the Northern Goshawk on Haida Gwaii. The Board has investigated and found the issues are significant but are currently being considered by existing planning processes. It concludes that it is premature to decide whether the issues have been adequately addressed and comments that cautious management should continue to be applied until planning processes are completed. This letter is the Board's report.

Background

The provincial government has established two WHAs (Datlamen and Bonanza) on Haida Gwaii for goshawks under the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy (IWMS) program. In September 2004 and January 2005, BC Timber Sales (BCTS) submitted two FDP amendments proposing harvesting in the Bonanza WHA. In a February 2005 letter to several agencies, including the Queen Charlotte Islands Forest District and BC Timber Sales, Ministry of Environment staff stated that the current general wildlife measures for the Datlamen and Bonanza WHAs could eliminate post-fledging area and foraging habitat because they do not maintain optimal quality, quantity and spatial distribution of habitat. In March 2005, the district manager notified BCTS that he did not approve the amendments, partly due to new information about the isolation of the Haida Gwaii goshawk population and the possible need for further measures for goshawks.

The Sierra Club filed its complaint after the district manager's decision, asserting that the current strategy for managing Northern Goshawks in the Queen Charlotte Islands Forest District was not adequate to conserve the population on Haida Gwaii. Specifically, the complainant asserted that there is inadequate management for foraging habitat and that the one percent cap on impact on timber supply does not allow adequate designation of WHAs. The preliminary results from a recent genetic study indicated that the goshawk population is isolated from the mainland. With the apparently low amount of exchange of individuals with mainland and Vancouver Island populations, the long term viability of the Haida Gwaii population is uncertain.

The complainant is concerned that there is a lack of coordination between licensees with respect to harvesting plans and that this could lead to a failure to conserve sufficient mature and old forest within the existing WHAs. Also, there is no requirement for licensees to conduct pre-harvest nest surveys. This could prevent finding active nests until harvesting is under way, possibly compromising the value of the habitat and affecting breeding success. The complainant cited a past example where this situation occurred, and stated that the nest area in that case had not been occupied since the logging occurred.

Discussion

The investigation did not examine the BCTS amendment specifically because it was not approved. The investigation did reveal evidence substantiating the issues raised in the complaint regarding the strategy for managing goshawks. However, it also found those issues could potentially be addressed through the completion and implementation of two planning processes currently underway. These are the Haida Gwaii land use planning process and the preparation of a recovery strategy by the Northern Goshawk Recovery Team.

The draft Haida Gwaii land use plan includes three management recommendations for goshawks:

1. To complete a comprehensive landscape level inventory of known and predicted goshawk territories to identify the presence of goshawks, nest locations and suitable foraging habitat. The recommendation includes pursuing funding to complete the work.
2. Protect goshawk nest areas within a reserve of 200 hectares. This recommendation includes options to either retain all known nest areas or to retain all known nest areas and potentially suitable nest areas and ensure these are not isolated from foraging habitat.
3. Manage known and potential suitable goshawk territories to maintain suitable foraging habitat. This recommendation includes options to either develop a management strategy for maintaining foraging habitat or to reserve all highly suitable foraging habitat and maintain 60 percent of suitable foraging habitat.

As part of the recovery strategy, the Northern Goshawk Recovery Team is trying to determine the amount of existing goshawk habitat and how many pairs would ensure

viable populations for four conservation regions, including Haida Gwaii. This work is expected to be completed in 2007.

In addition to these two processes, negotiations are occurring between the provincial government and the Haida Nation. In June 2005, the provincial government reached an agreement with the Haida Nation for managing several species on Haida Gwaii. Seven additional goshawk sites were temporarily protected through an order under the *Government Actions Regulation*. This protection ended in late July, but was replaced with a 90-day letter of understanding with the licensees while the draft land use plan is being completed and reviewed. That extension has expired; however, negotiations are still underway.

Conclusions

The issues raised in the complaint are valid. Research indicates that measures for foraging habitat in the existing WHAs may not be adequate. Measures for future WHAs under the 2004 IWMS do not require foraging habitat to be identified and protected. Some coordination between licensees was evident in the unapproved BCTS FDP amendment. Nesting surveys are done by some licensees but are not a requirement. However, the issues are being considered under existing planning processes. It is uncertain whether these will satisfactorily conserve goshawks, but it is premature to conclude that the issues are not being adequately addressed.

Commentary

Although the key issues are being considered by planners and the recovery team, completion of land use and recovery plans and final decisions by government on these are still some way off. During the investigation, another two FDP amendments were advertised, one including proposed cutblocks adjacent to the Bonanza WHA and the other with cutblocks proposed within the WHA. The Board has the following comments about the current management situation on Haida Gwaii.

- Protecting suitable foraging habitat is a significant issue, regardless of the final results of the genetic research.
- There is no strategy for managing goshawk habitat beyond individual WHAs. The current Identified Wildlife Management Strategy (IWMS) account has weaknesses. It is based on goshawk research from a very different ecosystem (south-western U.S., not coastal BC) and local research indicates it may not represent the situation on Haida Gwaii. Local research indicates that foraging habitat requirements may be significantly greater (10,000 hectares) than provided for in the IWMS. The account is also constrained by the one percent cap policy. Requirements for protection of foraging habitat have been removed and made into recommendations. That was done so that timber supply impacts were reduced and more core nesting areas could be protected without exceeding the one percent cap policy. However, this was done with the expectation that foraging habitat could be protected through coarse-filter mechanisms, such as old growth management areas (OGMAs), ungulate winter ranges and other

WHAs. On Haida Gwaii, the options for doing this with these mechanisms appear limited.

- At the landscape level, there is currently no strategy for protecting habitat and no strategy to provide foraging habitat. Draft OGMAs, which may protect some goshawk habitat, have been developed in only one landscape unit. OGMA development in other areas is less advanced. Furthermore, the complainant commented that harvesting is occurring in the non-contributing landbase and may be reducing goshawk habitat there. This issue was discussed in relation to marbled murrelet habitat on Haida Gwaii in a recent Board report (FPB/IRC/114 October 2005). The Board has recently initiated a special investigation into the implementation of spatial conservation objectives such as OGMAs and WHAs in two forest districts on the South Coast. This investigation will consider the impact that harvesting in the non-contributing landbase has on conservation objectives.
- The possible increased threat to the population due to the potential isolation of the population, evidence for the possible need for a larger foraging area, and the lack of a landscape level strategy all suggest that caution is warranted concerning forest practices in the Bonanza and Datlamen WHAs, and in management around new WHAs and known nest sites. Cautious management that considers the implications of the new information when new harvesting plans are proposed should continue to be applied until the current planning processes, in particular the work of the recovery team, are completed.

I hope that the Board's involvement has been helpful. If you have any remaining questions or concerns, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Bruce Fraser, PhD, Chair
Forest Practices Board

cc: Erica McClaren, Northern Goshawk Recovery Team
Gord Enemark, ILMB