

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
State of Washington Department of Natural Resources  
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The Office of the Governor

# News Release

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## **Governor, Commissioner of Public Lands Sign Forest Plan HCP Today**

OLYMPIA - Governor Chris Gregoire and Commissioner of Public Lands Doug Sutherland today signed documents completing the Washington State Forest Practices Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), now approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries.

At a gathering of more than 100 stakeholders involved in the development of the HCP, David Allen, Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bob Lohn, Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries announced their approval of the plan.

The HCP is a 50-year agreement with the federal government for protection of Washington's streams and forests that provide habitat for more than 70 aquatic species, including salmon, many of them threatened or endangered.

Set in motion by the Forests and Fish Act, the programmatic, statewide plan covers 60,000 miles of streams running through 9.3 million acres of forestland. Today's events conclude more than a decade of collaboration developing the plan.

Governor Gregoire and Commissioner Sutherland submitted an application for the HCP to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries in February of 2005.

Allen's and Lohn's announcements and Governor Gregoire's and Commissioner Sutherland's signatures on the documents mark the completion of the HCP development and approval process. The Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries' approval recognizes that practicing forestry by Washington State's Forest Practices Rules meets federal Endangered Species Act requirements for aquatic species covered under the plan.

"This is an approach that engages local citizens and ignites interest in the long-term environmental health and economic sustainability of the Northwest," said Governor Gregoire. "Leadership demands that we work in common cause for the greater good, and that's what this Forest and Fish plan accomplishes."

Commissioner Sutherland thanked all those who contributed to the development of the HCP. "Washington State owes tremendous gratitude to the stakeholders and elected officials who participated in the process. The results of their efforts will be to help preserve healthy forests and clean streams for our wild salmon and other aquatic species, and will provide jobs and secure sustainable and responsible management of our forests, now and for the next 50 years," he said.

Congressman Norm Dicks congratulated the State on the HCP. Dicks, who serves as the ranking member of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, said, "This HCP agreement assures a consistent level of environmental protection across a broad area of our state that includes private as well as public lands, and as such it offers the most effective means of protecting critical habitat for a wide range of species."

Three state legislators also praised the Forest Practices Habitat Conservation Plan.

State Senator Debbie Regala addressed the crowd and said, "In 1999, Washington State took bold steps on a path never before traveled \* the Forests and Fish plan. A key element to the success of that vision of sustainable timber harvest and fish populations is adaptive management \* a path meant to take us where the science leads. This, too, is a path not often traveled because it's daring and difficult. Just like the signs in the National Parks that remind us to stay on the trail, today's celebration reminds us not to stray from our chosen path and to keep moving forward with determination. I know we are up to the challenge."

In a statement read by Commissioner Sutherland, State Representative Jim Buck said, "The evolution of Forests and Fish from a report, to an agreement, to a law, to a forest practices rule, to a federally recognized HCP shows a continuing commitment by Washingtonians to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. In light of this good faith effort, it is only fitting that the federal government provide all of the assurances permitted by law to those who comply with Washington's Forest Practices Act."

Sutherland also read a statement by State Senator Mark Doumit. Doumit said, "I think I'm speaking for the vast number of my legislative colleagues from both parties when I talk about the Forest and Fish Agreement and subsequent HCP. In short, we like what was done, why it was done, and how it was done. The Legislature liked this in 1999 and likes it even more now. My colleagues and I will continue to work in making this agreement a success for all citizens of the state."

The Forests and Fish Act, passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Locke in 1999, directed the Forest Practices Board to adopt the Forests and Fish Report into the State Forest Practices Rules. Founded on science, the rules establish for Washington State the greatest level of protection for forested streams in the United States.

The Act also directed the governor, or the governor's designee, to obtain assurance on behalf of the state of Washington that the rules meet federal Endangered Species Act requirements. As designated by

then-Governor Locke, Commissioner Sutherland directed the Department of Natural Resources to work closely with the various stakeholders to develop the Habitat Conservation Plan and seek its approval by the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.