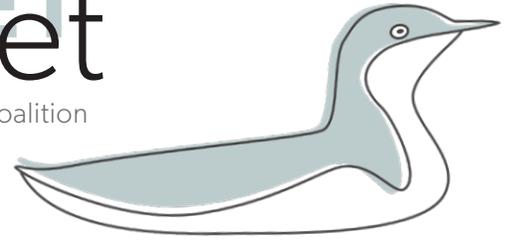


MARBLED MURRELET

Marbled Murrelet

Information on the bird & the plan to protect it | compiled by the Murrelet Coalition



The marbled murrelet is unique among seabirds.

They spend most of their time on the Pacific Ocean, but they nest on the mossy branches of mature and old-growth conifers, flying up to 55 miles inland to deliver food until the offspring leaves the nest. Their range extends from California to Alaska, with significant genetic differences between the northern and southern populations.

The murrelet, like many species that depend on old-growth ecosystems, are in decline due to loss of their nesting habitat, primarily from historic and ongoing logging.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the murrelet as a threatened species in the contiguous US in 1992. Since then, the Washington state population has shrunk by 44% with only about 7,500 birds remaining. To help prevent local extinction, Washington state up-listed the marbled murrelet to state endangered in 2016.

MARBLED MURRELET

Scientific name

Brachyramphus marmoratus

Nesting habitat

Mature and old-growth conifers

Range

California to Alaska

Current Washington Population

7,500 individuals

MURRELETS ON WASHINGTON STATE LANDS

The southern population of murrelets have lost about 27% of nesting habitat on non-federal lands in Washington, Oregon, and California, with the most habitat loss occurring in Washington.

State-managed lands are especially important to murrelets and contain roughly 15% (~213,000 acres) of all existing murrelet habitat in the state. This habitat is needed to serve as a temporal bridge to support the population over the next 30-50 years while murrelets are most vulnerable to extirpation.

In 1997, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) agreed to a Habitat Conservation Plan with the USFWS in order to comply with the Endangered Species Act. This plan is intended to give protections to listed species while allowing DNR to continue harvesting timber on state lands.

A conservation strategy for the murrelet is a requirement of this plan but DNR has been operating under an interim strategy since 1997. Finally, after 20 years in the making, the DNR released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement on six alternatives for a Marbled Murrelet Long-Term Conservation Strategy (MMLTCS).



WHAT MURRELETS NEED TO SURVIVE IN WASHINGTON

The most pressing concern about DNR's proposed strategies is that only one – Alternative F – is based on science. Additionally, that strategy incorporates only the best available science as of 2008. Since then, scientific analyses have shown that there are high density nesting areas in the Straits of Juan de Fuca and in southwest Washington.



credit Alaska Fish and Game

All six MMLTCS Alternatives currently under consideration allow the harvest of some amount of existing murrelet nesting habitat in the first decade of the long-term conservation strategy's plan with the assurance that murrelet habitat will grow in the future. For DNR to receive approval for logging murrelet habitat, USFWS requires mitigation that minimizes harm to murrelets. Any conservation strategy that harvests murrelet habitat now, with the promise that habitat will grow in the future, is not proper mitigation that minimizes harm to murrelets. Harvesting any habitat while the species is in serious decline could put the murrelet at risk for local extinction.

DNR should implement a stronger conservation strategy, one that makes a significant contribution to the survival of murrelets in Washington state, one that incorporates the best available science. A successful long-term conservation plan incorporates the following elements:

- Protects forests that provide murrelet habitat for at least the first decade of the conservation plan
- Protects forests that will become quality murrelet habitat in the near future
- Has larger buffer areas (150 meters) adjacent to occupied nest sites and old forest habitat
- Protects murrelet population hotspots along the Strait of Juan de Fuca and in SW Washington

THE STATE TRUST MANDATE

Part of what makes conserving the murrelet's habitat so challenging is Washington's State Trust Mandate, a constitutional law linking state-managed timberlands to the funding of school construction and county services. In addition to putting undue pressure on the environment, this has resulted in economic uncertainty in rural communities due to fluctuations of the market.

DNR should consider a more diversified approach to funding counties to ensure a stable and reliable stream of revenue to support critical services. To find long-term sustainable solutions that benefit both murrelets and rural communities, the Commissioner of Public Lands and the Governor should convene a taskforce to consider approaches that deliver better value to trust beneficiaries, including:

- Creating a unitary trust for certain state forest lands so all counties share the benefits from state public lands more evenly
- Increasing funding and application of the Trust Land Transfer program
- Expanding contract harvesting
- Engaging carbon markets to capture value from carbon stored in older trees

The Murrelet Coalition is comprised of Conservation Northwest, Defenders of Wildlife, Seattle Audubon, Olympic Forest Coalition, Washington Environmental Council, and Washington Forest Law Center.