

## **OCS Chapter 1. Introduction to the Strategy**

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### **Oregon's Unique Natural Heritage**

Oregonians have always been proud of the place they live; proud of the diversity of landscapes and people, and of Oregon's strong ties to our fish and wildlife. The Oregon Conservation Strategy (Strategy) celebrates Oregon's natural heritage by outlining goals and identifying actions that conserve and restore Oregon's species, habitats and ecosystems. It is not a regulatory document but instead presents issues, opportunities, and recommended voluntary actions that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation in Oregon. The recommendations within the Strategy can be used to address species and habitat conservation needs, expand existing partnerships and develop new ones, and provide a context for balancing Oregon's conservation and development priorities.

Oregon is a melting pot of traditions, cultures, ecological regions, geological formations and political ideologies. Geologically, Oregon is in a constant state of change. Colliding tectonic plates, volcanoes, glaciers and erosion mold and sculpt the Oregon landscape. The state's climate is shaped by its mountains. Storms arrive from the ocean, dumping 60-200 inches of rain annually in coastal areas and releasing most of the rest along the peaks of the Cascades. By the time the clouds reach the east side of the mountains, towns like Madras receive just 10 inches of rain per year. Varied climate and topography produce 1,500 different types of soils, representing at least 10 of the 12 soil orders found in the United States.

Oregon's history and identity are closely connected to its natural resources. Place names like Beaverton, Bear Creek, Cape Falcon, Fox Hollow, Goose Lake and Troutdale speak to Oregonians' strong historic ties to fish and wildlife. Native Americans, fur trappers, pioneers, and today's bird-watchers, anglers, and hunters all have appreciated sharing this landscape with wild creatures.

Oregon's varied geology, soil, and climate support a unique collection of species and habitats, which help define the state's culture and economy. Oregon's prosperity depends on use of land for agriculture, timber, industry, ranching and outdoor recreation. These working landscapes, along with wilderness and other natural areas, provide the rich mix of habitat that supports Oregon's fish and wildlife.

However, there are significant challenges to maintaining Oregon's fish and wildlife habitats. Habitats have been fragmented or degraded by construction of towns and roads, alteration of river systems, and

intensive land management practices. Some areas have been completely converted to other uses. While not all land conversion results in habitat loss, the changes people have made to habitats can isolate fish and wildlife habitats into increasingly smaller patches, limit the functions that habitats provide for species, and ultimately make it more difficult for ecosystems to provide the services that define Oregon's history, culture, and economy. Improvements in land management practices are beginning to improve habitat conditions. For example, historic overgrazing is declining as improved management techniques for rangelands are implemented. Important habitat areas are more often considered before roads and buildings are constructed, and water users are increasingly working together to restore more natural hydrologic systems in Oregon's rivers and streams.

The Strategy provides an adaptive and comprehensive framework for continued positive action and new innovation. Building upon previous plans, it provides a menu of recommended voluntary actions and tools to help inspire local communities, landowners, and citizens to define their own conservation role.

Oregonians have long demonstrated their willingness to work together for the common good. Tapping that spirit will encourage new alliances, partnerships, coordination, and collaboration among agencies, tribes, organizations, businesses, and landowners to take care of Oregon's unique natural treasures.

### **Pulling Together to Make a Difference: a Collaborative Approach to Conservation**

Over the past three decades, a growing number of Oregonians have recognized that the state's landscape has changed, affecting the fish and wildlife populations that depend on it. Past efforts to conserve fish and wildlife have mostly been crisis-driven, focused on individual species, and contingent upon available funds. Now, conservation partners have a clearer understanding that nature works on many scales and that a strategic and comprehensive approach is needed to address species and their habitats across broad landscapes as well as at local sites. Nationally and locally, people are seeking ways to be more effective. By engaging with interested citizen groups and working together in the spirit of cooperation, Oregon can achieve long-term fish and wildlife conservation.

### **A Solid Foundation: Oregon's Existing Planning, Regulatory, and Voluntary Framework**

Oregon has a conservation framework in the form of plans, regulations, and grass-roots voluntary efforts. These processes have built the knowledge base, standards, and relationships that set the stage for creating a statewide conservation strategy. The Strategy has built upon this framework to promote common goals.

The Strategy works to promote integration and innovation within Oregon's existing conservation framework, recognizing that many important conservation actions are covered by regulatory requirements, but other actions are voluntary, and incentives or market-based approaches can be quite helpful.

*Regulations* – State and federal laws govern issues such as water quality, air quality, land use, and species protection. For example, the legal and institutional framework for maintaining private forestland is in place through the Oregon Board of Forestry's *Forest Program for Oregon*, the Forest Practices Act, and statewide planning Goal 4, Forest Lands.

*Voluntary Efforts* – From counting birds during the annual Christmas Bird Count to planting willows in riparian areas, Watershed Councils, forest collaboratives, non-profit organizations, private landowners and other interested citizens already are contributing voluntarily to conserving Oregon’s fish and wildlife through both organized and individual efforts.

*Plans* - Numerous planning efforts by a variety of entities have identified priority species, habitats and actions within Oregon. These plans have all differed in their purposes, goals, and scales of analysis. Some examples of large-scale planning efforts include the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, and The Nature Conservancy’s Ecoregional Assessments.

The Strategy builds on all of these efforts to provide a framework for a cohesive, statewide, non-regulatory approach to habitat and species conservation. Implementation requires coordination among the state and federal agencies that implement existing regulations, and among variety of groups that implement plans. The Strategy can also support and expand existing voluntary efforts. For more information on Oregon’s existing planning and regulatory framework, see [Appendix 1](#).

### **Oregon’s Conservation Strategy: What It Is and What It Can Do**

#### **Oregon Conservation Strategy Goals:**

1. Maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations by maintaining and restoring functioning habitats
2. Prevent declines of at-risk species
3. Reverse any declines in these resources where possible

The Strategy is intended to provide a long-term, big-picture “blueprint” for conserving Oregon's natural resources for today and for future generations. It outlines how and where the state and its conservation partners, including landowners and land managers, can best focus this work. The Strategy is intended to:

- Prevent species from becoming imperiled, thereby reducing the risk of future species listings that could result in additional regulations for Oregon’s businesses and industries
- Provide a wide range of voluntary conservation tools, so local communities and landowners can choose what is appropriate for their situations and goals
- Provide a common conservation vision to guide state and federal agencies toward effective coordination and fewer conflicts
- Leverage limited conservation resources, such as money, equipment and time in a more efficient and effective manner by:
  - Focusing conservation actions on the species and habitats of greatest conservation priority
  - Identifying areas where conservation activities will provide the greatest benefit at the landscape scale
  - Increasing coordination, collaboration, and partnership to produce cumulative benefits
- Demonstrate how local conservation actions fit into a broader regional or statewide perspective
- Provide a role for every interested Oregonian, from local neighborhood clean-ups to large-scale habitat restoration projects to citizen-based monitoring

- Encourage voluntary conservation and recognize contributions already made by landowners, land managers and other entities
- Increase the efficiency and conservation benefits of existing voluntary incentive programs, and also identify additional needs
- Provide guidance and coordination to preserve and restore the services provided by healthy ecosystems that benefit all Oregonians
- Synthesize existing plans and credible, peer-reviewed science to provide a statewide context to address the state's conservation needs
- Expand the successful voluntary approach of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds to maintain and restore upland areas for improved watershed function
- Assist in managing landscapes to safeguard Oregon's high quality of life and natural resource legacy— one of the state's strengths in attracting and retaining businesses
- Demonstrate Oregon's commitment to conserve its species and habitats
- Increase coordination among states to address issues of common concern
- Serve as a long-term strategy for the next decade and beyond, while still remaining a dynamic, living approach that will be adjusted as new information and insights are gained.

#### **Oregon's Conservation Strategy: What It Is Not**

The Strategy is not regulatory. It works within the existing legal structure and is not a substitute for regulations. It does not challenge, change or expand regulations. It will not add new regulations.

The Strategy is not a substitute for existing planning efforts. It synthesizes and builds upon existing planning efforts to weave them into a statewide framework for action. It also highlights ways to expand, enhance and improve conservation work.

The Strategy is not restrictive. It will not impose limits or new requirements on private landowners or public land users. It is not intended to impose additional rules, fees or processes. It instead encourages voluntary action and collaboration.

The Strategy is not an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife management plan. Rather, it is intended to be a conservation tool for all Oregonians. The issues identified in this document are often complex and cannot be solved by any one agency or entity. They require cooperative, coordinated approaches for long-term success.

### The National Approach

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires each U.S. state and territory receiving State Wildlife Grants to complete a State Wildlife Action Plan (i.e., the Oregon Conservation Strategy) and to update that effort at least every 10 years.

The emphasis of each state strategy is on voluntary measures and collaboration. A state strategy that imposed additional regulation or adversely affected the state’s economy and communities would not meet the intent or objectives of the State Wildlife Grants Program. Each strategy must address factors affecting the health of the nation’s fish and wildlife, particularly those species in greatest need of conservation. The goal is to manage fish and wildlife populations and their habitat as a public trust, maintained as a national heritage.

Each state strategy must contain eight elements addressing species, habitats, problems, conservation actions, monitoring, strategy review, interagency coordination, and public involvement.

USFWS Required Eight Elements	Oregon’s Approach
1. Gather information on the distribution and abundance of fish and wildlife species.	Identify “Strategy Species,” those most in need of conservation, and summarize key information about them. Improve Oregon’s ability to map species distribution using both observational data and modeling.
2. Describe location and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of these species.	Identify “Strategy Habitats” to conserve a broad suite of species that reflect the diversity of fish and wildlife in the state, and map Conservation Opportunity Areas for Strategy Habitats, areas where conservation activities would have the greatest benefit and chances of success.
3. Describe problems which may adversely affect these species or their habitats. Identify information needed to improve conservation of species and habitats.	Describe limiting factors for Strategy Species and Habitats, and data gaps where information is needed. The Conservation Strategy describes conservation issues and limiting factors for each Strategy Species and Strategy Habitat, and describes seven Key Conservation Issues identified because of their impacts to Strategy Species and Habitats throughout the state.
4. Describe necessary conservation actions for species and habitats.	Outline conservation actions for Strategy Species and Habitats.
5. Propose ways to monitor the effectiveness of these conservation actions and ways to adapt actions as information or conditions change.	Describes guidance for monitoring.
6. Describe procedures to review the Conservation Strategy at regular intervals (not to exceed 10 years).	Describe how reviews and updates will occur.
7. Coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies and tribes that manage significant land and water areas or administer significant programs that affect species and	Coordinate extensively with federal, state, county, and local governments; tribes; non-governmental organizations; and landowner groups in developing the Strategy.

habitat conservation.	
8. Engage the public in planning and implementing the Conservation Strategy.	<p>A. Seek guidance from a Stakeholder Advisory Committee: a broad-based, geographically balanced committee representing outdoor interest groups, conservation groups, hunting and fishing interests, tourism interests, local governments, and organizations working with landowners</p> <p>B. Seek public input through public presentations. Solicit comments via an open public comment period. Incorporate public comment into the final version.</p> <p>C. Engage Oregonians throughout the state as the Strategy is updated and encourage participation in Strategy actions.</p>

**Scope of the 2015 update**

Although the entire document was reviewed and revised, the 10 – year update of the Oregon Conservation Strategy focused on: 1) Refining the priorities identified in 2006 to incorporate new data and information for Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, Key Conservation Issues, and Conservation Opportunity Areas; and 2) Showing the connections among Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats and Key Conservation Issues to better track conservation outcomes. The Strategy Species list has been updated using newly available science and research. Strategy Habitat mapping has been greatly improved through newly available spatial data. Specific data on Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, and Key Conservation Issues have been used in updating the Conservation Opportunity Areas. The Conservation Strategy’s new enhanced web format will facilitate user connections and movement between all sections of the Strategy, provide links to more specific, stepped – down planning efforts, and provide an opportunity to update supporting information about Strategy priorities more frequently.

## Oregon Conservation Strategy: 10–year Report

### Role of the Oregon Conservation Strategy Since 2006

In the 10 years since the Oregon Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) was first completed, the Conservation Strategy has continued to bring together diverse partners to identify common conservation priorities, encourage partnerships, and achieve conservation success, all without the need for regulation. Landowners; watershed councils; Soil & Water Conservation Districts; conservation organizations; outdoor interest groups; tribes; and state, federal and local agency partners and others find value in using a common set of priorities presented within the Strategy, including: Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs), and Key Conservation Issues. Consistent priorities and supporting information such as mapping and reporting tools help landowners and land managers take a strategic, big – picture view of Oregon’s landscape. The Conservation Strategy has also served as an information source, providing an introduction to Oregon’s conservation priorities and descriptions about natural resources issues and management approaches to various audiences.

### Use of the Oregon Conservation Strategy Since 2006

#### *Coordinate Conservation Priorities:*

Agencies, conservation organizations, public interest groups, and private citizens focus conservation efforts on the priorities identified in the Conservation Strategy. Some examples from the past decade include:

- The Oregon Board of Forestry uses the Strategy in their *Forestry Program for Oregon*
- The Bureau of Land Management used the Strategy in their ‘Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.’ This planning effort influences approximately 2.5 million acres of BLM-administered lands in western Oregon
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Surrogate Species Program used the Strategy Species to select species
- Oregon Department of Transportation used the Strategy to help develop priorities for wildlife crossings
- The collaborative Intertwine Alliance in the Portland area used the Strategy to develop a stepped – down [Regional Conservation Strategy](#)
- The [Oregon Greater Sage – Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy](#)
- The [Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan](#)

#### *Focus Investments:*

Several funding organizations use Conservation Strategy priorities as scoring criteria to evaluate proposals for conservation funding and to direct investments on the ground. Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, and Conservation Opportunity Areas are often cited as justification for conservation and restoration project proposals.

Since the Oregon Conservation Strategy was approved in 2006:

- The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has directed over \$20 million in State Wildlife Grants towards Conservation Strategy priority actions on the ground.
- ODFW’s [Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program](#) (WWMP) was established in 2010 to work with the Bonneville Power Administration and the state of Oregon to purchase wildlife mitigation properties within the Willamette Valley. Since 2010, the WWMP acquisitions have included over 9,000 acres within Conservation Strategy COAs, with another 1,400 acres in progress.
- The Farm Bill uses the Conservation Strategy to inform priorities and federal funding opportunities for easements, including both wetland and upland areas.

- [The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board](#) (OWEB) administers funding for conservation and watershed enhancements, refers to the Conservation Strategy as an information source for grant applicants, and has invested over \$122 million dollars in conservation and restoration activities within COAs.
- The [USDA Forest Service’s Forest Legacy Program](#) uses the Conservation Strategy to assist in prioritizing funding for projects that improve fish and wildlife habitat in forestlands.
- Federal Forest Health Program uses Strategy COAs to evaluate grant proposals that address forest health
- [The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation](#) (RMEF) and its partners have undergone projects to conserve and/or enhance habitat in over 14,000 acres within or near Conservation Strategy COAs.
- [The Conservation Registry](#) was established in 2008 as a way to record conservation actions across the landscape. It contains a record of nearly 6,000 unique conservation projects, including habitat restoration, conservation, monitoring, research and education happening within COAs.
- The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) has documented that within COAs over 32,000 acres of land have been protected within COLT properties, and an additional 16,000 acres of land have been protected by other Land Trusts and Non-governmental Organizations.
- Additionally, many conservation organizations, landowners, and local, state and federal partners have invested in projects within or near COAs, or addressed Strategy Species as part of other projects. For example, contributions from ranchers to water and wildlife conservation are described in [Oregon Cattlemens Association’s conservation report](#).

*\*Note that these numbers were calculated in the spring of 2015, and are provided as rounded numbers. Many projects are collaborative, and some projects or areas may be double counted in these estimates.*

#### *Information Source:*

For readers with an interest in Oregon’s natural heritage, the Conservation Strategy provides an introduction to new topics and a summary of major conservation issues and priorities. Landowners and conservation partners can consult the Conservation Strategy to find and refine potential projects and proposals.

- Since it was published in 2006, the Strategy has become an integral part of the [Oregon Master Naturalist](#) curriculum, providing an introduction to Oregon’s natural history for each ecoregion.
- The [Oregon Forest Resources Institute](#) has incorporated information from the Strategy into identification guides for Strategy Species in managed forest habitats.
- The Conservation Strategy provided the ability to further prioritize species, habitats, and areas (COA’s) within the [ODFW Crucial Habitat Assessment project](#), part of the [Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool](#) , a dynamic map defining crucial habitat for fish and wildlife consistently throughout the western states.

#### **How to Use the Oregon Conservation Strategy**

For more information see [Strategy Implementation: Everyone Can Help](#) [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)

*Information for Communities, Local Planners, and Other Organizations With an Interest in Oregon’s Natural Resources*

The Oregon Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) outlines priorities: Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, Conservation Opportunity Areas, Key Conservation Issues, and recommended voluntary actions for conservation in Oregon. These priorities were developed using the best scientific information available to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and partners in 2006, and were updated in 2015. The Strategy builds on Oregon's planning and regulatory framework and works within the existing legal structure, but is not regulatory.

Although Oregon's fish and wildlife are managed by ODFW, the habitats they depend on are managed by a patchwork of different types of land ownership and different land uses throughout the state. Conservation outcomes for Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats and Conservation Opportunity Areas depend upon communication of common priorities and shared stewardship. Communities, planners, and other organizations have a crucial role in stewardship of Oregon's natural resources.

Some suggestions to help community planners, local governments, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, tribes, federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, corporate interests, and large landowners find relevant information in the Strategy include:

- Grant applications for conservation and restoration projects:
  - Actions to benefit Strategy Species [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
  - Actions to benefit Strategy Habitats [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
  - Voluntary conservation actions to benefit Conservation Opportunity Areas [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
  - Guide to incentives programs (Appendix 2 [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)) for property owners. Cities and local governments can help property owners access information about incentives programs and implement conservation actions
- Land use actions: Considering natural resources information early in the process can help with energy planning, land use planning and more. To be informed of areas to avoid for development or areas to consider for mitigation actions, see:
  - Maps about fish, wildlife and habitats are available on ODFW's [Compass](#)
  - Voluntary conservation actions to benefit Conservation Opportunity Areas [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
- Regional planning and local comprehensive planning:
  - Maps about fish, wildlife and habitats available on ODFW's [Compass](#)
  - Voluntary conservation actions to benefit Conservation Opportunity Areas [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)

#### *Information for Private Landowners*

The Oregon Conservation Strategy (Conservation Strategy) outlines priorities: Strategy Species, Strategy Habitats, Conservation Opportunity Areas, Key Conservation Issues, and recommended voluntary actions for conservation in Oregon. These priorities were developed using the best scientific information available to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and partners in 2006, and were updated in 2015. The Strategy builds on Oregon's planning and regulatory framework and works within the existing legal structure, but is not regulatory.

Some suggestions to help landowners find relevant information in the Strategy:

- Grant applications for conservation and restoration projects:

- Actions to benefit Strategy Species [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
- Actions to benefit Strategy Habitats [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
- Voluntary conservation actions to benefit Conservation Opportunity Areas [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)
- Guide to incentives programs (Appendix 2 [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#)) for property owners. Cities and local governments can help property owners access information about incentives programs and implement conservation actions
- Stakeholders recognize several Challenges and Opportunities for Private Landowners to Initiate Conservation Actions, and include this as a major Key Conservation Issue. For an in-depth discussion and some solutions, see the Challenges and Opportunities for Private Landowners [\[Insert OCS weblink\]](#) chapter.

### ***The Oregon Nearshore Strategy - Conservation and Management Planning***

The Oregon Conservation Strategy includes both inland and nearshore habitats and species within a single State Wildlife Action Plan. However, because of multiple considerations, including that the nearshore is entirely in the public trust, the ODFW has developed a discrete section of the Conservation Strategy to address nearshore resource issues – the Oregon Nearshore Strategy. ODFW’s Marine Resources Program has undertaken this effort, working collaboratively and in complement with the Conservation Strategy team, to identify actions for ODFW and our partners to undertake in the nearshore to augment conservation and management goals for these unique and highly valued resources. [\[Insert ONS weblink\]](#).