

Biennial monitoring and evaluation snapshot

Siuslaw National Forest

2020-2021

Are we meeting our goals?

In 2020-2021, conditions on the Siuslaw National Forest are improving in many resource areas as we continue our emphasis on restoration. Aquatic habitats are slowly improving across the landscape. Wildlife habitat is showing some improvement in trends such as old-growth and late successional structure, even as northern spotted owl populations continue to decline. Amid the challenges of a global pandemic, an ongoing recreation boom in the region, and the unprecedented wildfire season of 2020, we continued to successfully maintain and protect valuable nature resources and recreational opportunities treasured by the public.

Recommended changes:

- While habitat on the Siuslaw National Forest is increasing, additional actions might be considered to address other stresses acting upon northern spotted owls.
- We need to update the Siuslaw National Forest Plan's off-highway vehicle noise standards to align with current use patterns.
- We will be considering improvements to recreation services.
- For Devils Staircase Wilderness, we need to amend the Forest Plan to establish desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for this area, prioritizing improvements to the invasive species, water, agency management actions, and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation elements.

Summary of monitoring results

Visitor satisfaction and progress on recreation goals

More than 95% of respondents to a visitor use survey were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their recreation experience on the Siuslaw National Forest. We met our target for access to undeveloped areas and wilderness. But we are not quite meeting our goal in terms of visitor services and developed facilities, areas in which we need to make improvements.

The Oregon Dunes is one of the premier off-highway vehicle (OHV) destinations on the Oregon coast. We have been monitoring noise levels for several decades, as noise is recognized as a concern for nearby residents and recreationists. We maintain a noise limit of 93 decibels as measured from individual machines, and we monitor this via courtesy checks. Our data show that **compliance rates are on a downward trend**, likely due to changes in OHV manufacturing, and we are considering an increase to the 93 decibel limit.

Timber output

The amount of timber volume sold has been above the objective set in our forest plan of 5 million board feet per year every year over the last decade. We have balanced our restoration goals, resource output, and public trust to reach a stable level of timber production of 40.0 million board-feet per year (8 times the planned and anticipated sale quantity). This trend has been stable over the last ten years on average and in actual deliverable outputs in the last five years.

Effects of management to protect or restore select populations

During the monitoring period from 1986 to 2022, suitable nesting and roosting habitat (combined) for Northern spotted owls increased by 58,500 acres (28 percent) owing to forest succession. Monitoring data indicates gradual recruitment of forest types associated with owl nesting, roosting, foraging, and dispersal is occurring, and we are **meeting the guidelines of the Northwest Forest Plan**.

While the amount of suitable owl habitat increased, the potential population carrying capacity on the Siuslaw NF decreased slightly. The **population of Northern spotted owl in the area decreased by 81 percent between 1995 and 2017**.

Western snowy plover population recovery is a primary goal for the central Oregon coast. We estimated the resident number of snowy plovers in Oregon at 604 individuals, **the highest number since monitoring began in 1990**. In 2021 we measured plover productivity, and while the total number of fledglings was lower than the previous four years, productivity was reasonably good.

Forest conditions

Forests in this region commonly attain 'mature' stand structure at 80 years, and 'old-growth' structure at 200 years. During the monitoring period from 1986 to 2022, forests represented by the 80-year stand age increased by 94,400 acres (33 percent) and forests in the 200-year age class increased by 47,900 acres (23 percent). Monitoring data indicate gradual recruitment of late-successional old-growth forest types as forest succession continues without setbacks from major forest disturbances. The **older forest landscape is becoming less fragmented** as scattered older trees begin to form small patches.

During the monitoring period from 1986 to 2017 we saw a gradual **decrease in early-seral forest** structure and a gradual increase in late-seral forest structure.

Watershed and soil health

Degraded conditions in some of our streams are symptoms caused by lack of large wood due to the historic removal of instream wood, roads, and over-harvest of riparian trees. Since 2010, we have restored more than 300 acres of riparian habitat, more than **60 miles of stream** have been restored, and over **38 miles of critical habitat has been opened** to migratory aquatics species by removing failing barrier culverts. Generally cool water temperatures are within tolerances of aquatic organisms.

Since 2020 over **1,300 logs have been placed in Oregon coast coho salmon habitat streams**, and more than 8 acres of riparian habitat have been planted with a variety of conifer and native hardwoods. By completing these restoration projects, we are addressing key habitat indicators for Oregon coast coho for future delisting of the species.

Monitoring shows that the practices we use to control water pollution are effective: we are 100 percent in compliance with water quality regulations on projects that implement these practices.

