

HEADWATER CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Background:

When the DNR agreed to their State Trust Lands HCP (1.8 million acres), it set required riparian buffer widths for Type 1, 2, 3 and 4 streams, but not for Type 5 streams on stable slopes. They agreed to continue the then-current “default” management for the interim of 10 years, while doing research (i.e. the Riparian Ecosystem Management Studies, or REMS) to determine what would be needed on Type 5 streams to form the new HCP Riparian Strategy. That research will not be completed for another two years. However, DNR is now proposing the permanent long-term strategy for Type 5 waters.

Summary of Strategy:

In essence, DNR’s proposal for the long-term protection of Type 5 streams is to reallocate some buffers from currently protected Type 4 or Type 5 streams to higher-priority sensitive sites (stream confluences (Type 5 to Type 5), seeps, springs, alluvial fans, stream-associated wetlands connected to 100-yr. flood zone) or to dominant/mainstem Type 5 streams.

Support:

- New protection for certain sensitive sites.
- The use of LIDAR in mapping headwater streams and wetlands.

Problems:

- An internal retrospective analysis of current protections on Type 5 Waters was done to determine what additional protection, if any, would be needed. This study is fatally flawed because it did not measure stream widths and thus confirm that the study was of actual Type 5 waters.
- The ten years of study required in the HCP to determine long term protection of Type 5 waters, is not yet complete. When it is finished it is required to undergo peer review, because it was partly funded with public money through the FP CMER process.
- Reallocation of buffers from currently protected areas is an inappropriate strategy.

Requested Actions:

- Do not send the Headwaters Conservation Strategy out for SEPA review.
- All streams, wetlands, and sensitive sites need to be fully and accurately mapped and typed as the first order of business, using LIDAR if available, or during forest practices until LIDAR is available. This is the most important measure to ensure protection for headwater systems.
- Drop Reallocation of protections as a strategy.
- Improve protection of small wetlands.

Attachment: Conservation Caucus letter