

11 Acronyms to Save the Marbled Murrelet



Photo, used with permission, Glenn Bartley © 2009

For many recreational birders, learning the technical language used in the management of our threatened and endangered birds is, quite frankly, no fun. Keeping track of the acronyms alone—ESA, USFWS, DNR, HCP, LTCS, DEIS, EIS, SEPA, and NEPA, for example—can be overwhelming and a barrier to advocacy. But taking pleasure observing the birds and advocating for their conservation.

Right now the bird that is closest to my heart—the Marbled Murrelet—needs advocates from the birding and conservation community. Throughout its range from Alaska to central California, murrelet populations are in steep decline. Washington murrelet population declined 44% between 2001 and 2015.

The primary cause of the general decline of the marbled murrelet is the historic and ongoing logging of the mature and old-growth forests where the Marbled Murrelet nests. In Washington, 15% of this habitat is found on the 1.3 million acres of state lands managed by our Department of Natural Resources. For the past several years, the way this agency manages this habitat for murrelet conservation has been under review. There is still time to help ensure the conservation strategy selected is one that may actually help save the murrelet from extirpation in Washington.

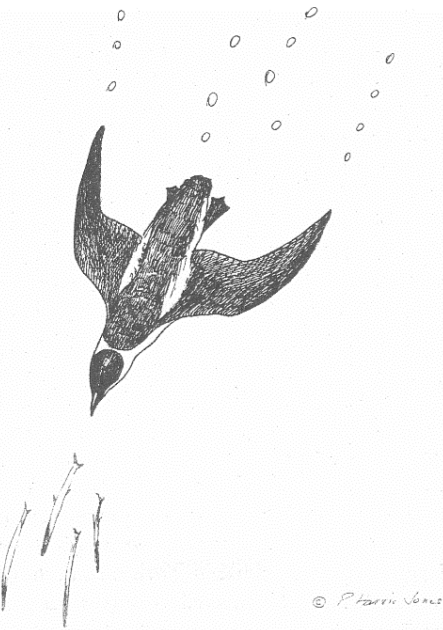
All it takes is a little brushing up on some acronyms. By doing so, you'll quickly learn the basics of how the laws, agencies, and policies they stand for work together to determine the fate of the Marbled Murrelet.

ESA: Endangered Species Act. In 1973, this Act was approved by the U.S. Congress and signed into law (by then President Richard Nixon) to protect and recover the nation's imperiled wildlife species—both plants and animals—that were sliding toward extinction. In 1992, the Marbled Murrelet was listed as a threatened species under the ESA in Washington, Oregon, and California. In 1993, Washington State added the murrelet to its list of threatened and endangered species. Though most of the U.S. murrelet population is found in Alaska, the bird receives no special protection in this state.

USFWS: United States Fish and Wildlife Service Is the federal agency responsible for deciding which species are protected under the **ESA** and for enforcing the laws in the **ESA** that work to protect the listed species.

DNR: Washington State Department of Natural Resources This agency manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned land, including 1.3 million acres within the range of the marbled murrelet. Most of this land is state forested state trust land. The DNR is legally mandated by the U.S. Congress to generate revenue from these trust lands to fund a variety of state and county public institutions (schools, libraries, hospitals, roads). Revenue comes from mining, logging, grazing, hunting, recreation, leasing for communication towers wind turbines, and other sources. This is a problem for the marbled murrelet: the DNR must generate revenue for the state and counties by logging murrelet habitat *and* protect the marbled murrelet by not logging its habitat.

BNR: Board of Natural Resources. This board consists of an elected director (the Commissioner of Public Lands) and five appointed members who oversee the activities of the DNR, which includes approving timber sales and establishing conservation plans for listed wildlife on state lands.



HCP: Habitat Conservation Plan Since 1997, the DNR has been managing murrelet habitat under a Habitat Conservation Plan. In a nutshell, the HCP allows the DNR to apply to the USFWS for a permit to incidentally “take” (kill) marbled murrelets during logging provided this take is minimized or mitigated by conserving habitat elsewhere. Because of lack of scientific information on the murrelet in 1997, DNR created an *interim* conservation strategy, which has been in place for 20 years and has been inadequate for accomplishing DNR’s stated murrelet conservation goals.

LTCS: Long-Term Conservation Strategy The official name of the strategy the DNR has stated will *make a significant contribution to maintaining and protecting marbled murrelet populations.* The current LTCS, based on the science available in 1997, is being updated by the DNR. With much public input, the DNR released a set of six alternatives for the new LTCS in December 2016.

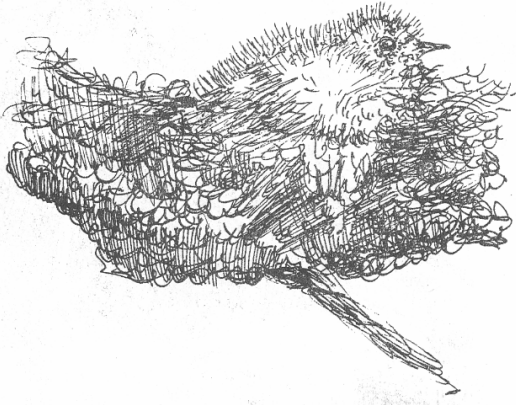
DEIS: Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This “statement” is a huge document issued by the Department of Natural Resources, issued in December 2016, to identify the significant adverse impacts that the marbled murrelet’s LTCS would have on the environment and to suggest steps to mitigate those impacts. The 90-day public comment period generated several thousand letters, all of which are read and evaluated during the environmental review known as...

SEPA: State Environmental Policy Act This provides the framework for state agencies (the DNR in this case) to review and consider the environmental impact of the proposed alternative Long-Term Conservation Strategy. The DEIS and EIS are the tools the DNR uses to conduct what is referred to as the “SEPA review.”

NEPA: National Environmental Policy Act Similar to SEPA, but with a national focus because the marbled murrelet is listed as a federally threatened species in Washington, Oregon, and California.

You do not need to tackle Marbled Murrelet conservation alone! Audubon Washington, local Audubon chapters, and a coalition of conservation groups working as the Marbled Murrelet Coalition have been offering guidance on providing public comment through their newsletters, online action alerts, and social media. Stay tuned! Stay connected!

Two more acronyms and you’re done!



EIS: Environmental Impact Statement: The document created when the DNR and USFWS take into consideration all the comments on the DEIS. Because none of the alternatives proposed met muster as of July 2017, a supplemental draft EIS is necessary. Once this is issued, there will be a public comment period, a final EIS, and then USFWS will publish a biological opinion and other official statements, the BNR will decide whether or not to adopt the Long Term Conservation Strategy and the USFWS will issue the DNR a new incidental take permit (likely in 2018).

MaMu This is not actually an acronym, it is the scientific code word for the Marbled Murrelet. (American Robins are AmRo, Pigeon Guillemots are PiGu). Pronouncing “mamu” is shorter and easier than pronouncing marbled murrelet (and *Brachyramphus marmoratus*). But, whether say mamu, merlits, murr-a-lettes, or murr-lettes, these silent, secretive, vulnerable birds need your voice.

Written and updated (August 2017) by [Maria M. Ruth](#), author, *Rare Bird: Pursuing the Mystery of the Marbled Murrelet*. Artwork © by Paul Harris Jones and used here with permission. If you find this document helpful, please feel free to forward, share, excerpt, post, and otherwise distribute.