

## *12 Acronyms to Save the Marbled Murrelet*



Photo, used with permission, by Dan Cushing and S. Kim Nelson

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 2016.

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.

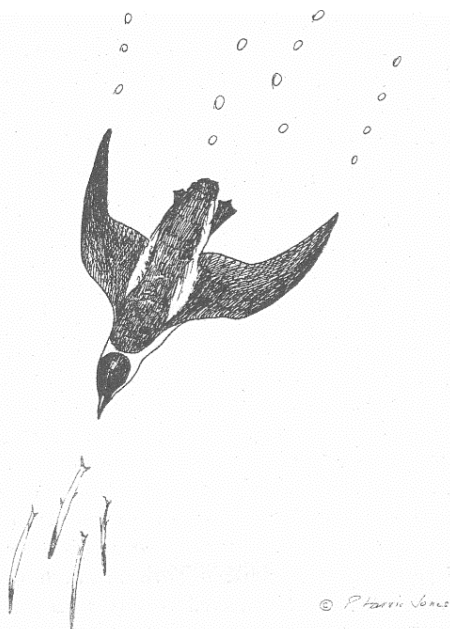
All it takes is a little brushing up on some acronyms. By doing so, you'll quickly learn the basics of how the laws, agencies, and policies they stand for work together to determine the fate of the Marbled Murrelet.

**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 species. In 2016, the state uplisted the murrelet from “threatened” status to the more serious “endangered.” 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 21 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 interim 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 actually a huge document issued by the Department of Natural Resources. In December 2016, the DRN issued a DEIS to identify the significant adverse impacts that each of the LTCS alternatives 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 were read, evaluated, and---whoops---instead of moving on to the next phase (see SEPA and NEPA below), the DNR went back to the drawing board, crunched more numbers, ran additional analyses, refined population models, considered public input, and added two additional alternatives. As of June 2018 we have eight (8) alternatives. They are referred to by alphabet letters—so Alternative A through Alternative H. Insiders use “Alt” instead of “Alternative” (presumably to save time).

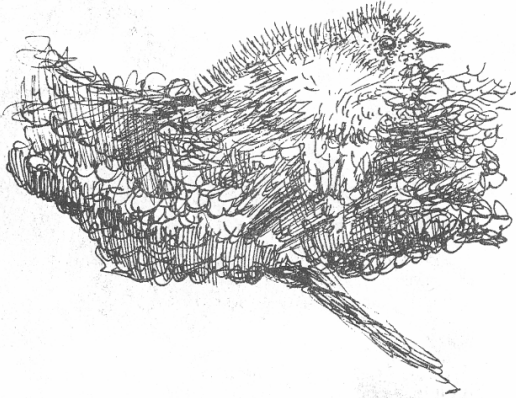
**NEW ACRONYM! RDEIS: Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement.** The DNR plans to release this revised (new, bigger, better) document on September 4, 2018. The release date may be delayed in light of recently proposed amendments by the U.S. Department of the Interior (which oversees the USFWS) to weaken the 1972 *Endangered Species Act*. Once the RDEIS is released, a 60-day public comment period will begin.

**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! A coalition of conservation groups working together as the Marbled Murrelet Coalition will again offer you guidance on providing public comment.

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 RDEIS. Once the EIS is issued, there will be a public comment period, a final EIS. Then the USFWS will publish a biological opinion (known as a “biop”) and other official statements. Then the BNR will decide whether or not to adopt the Long Term Conservation Strategy. Then the USFWS will issue the DNR a new incidental take permit.

**MaMu** This is not actually an acronym. It is the scientific code for the Marbled Murrelet. (American Robins are AmRo, Pigeon Guillemots are PiGu). Pronouncing “mamu” is shorter and easier than pronouncing Marbled Murrelet (or its Latin name, *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 2018) 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.