

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Adaptive Management Program: Improving consensus-based decision-making

The goal of the Forest Practices Act (Act) is to protect the state's public resources (fish, wildlife, water and capital improvements) while maintaining a viable timber industry. Adaptive management is an important tool within the Act for ensuring Washington's forest practices regulations are based on science. The Adaptive Management Program was created in 1988, which was codified in 1999 by the legislature as part of the Forests and Fish legislation. The program provides science-based recommendations to the Forest Practices Board regarding whether changes are needed to rules and guidance for forest practices in the state. It is also considered an alternative to years of costly litigation. Rules governing forest practices – including timber harvest and road construction – were achieved through science-based policy negotiations in an effort to meet these goals.

- Compliance with the federal Clean Water and Endangered Species acts
- Provide harvestable runs of fish
- Maintain a viable timber industry

The Forest Practices Board oversees the Adaptive Management Program, which consists of the Timber, Fish and Wildlife Policy Committee (Policy) and the Cooperative Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Committee (Science). Members represent nine different caucuses with sometimes opposing interests. The caucuses include forest landowners, counties, the environmental community, tribal governments, and federal and state agencies. The different arms of the program must work together and make consensus decisions about whether a case can be made for adjusting rules. While these decisions are informed by science, consensus is difficult to obtain in many cases.

The Forest Practices Board asked the Office of the Washington State Auditor to conduct a performance audit to help identify ways to make the program more efficient and effective.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This performance audit will examine the processes used by the Adaptive Management Program, look at previous program reviews, and analyze state and federal process requirements and leading practices instituted by similar programs elsewhere. This audit will seek to answer these questions:

1. Does the program use procedures that meet state and federal process requirements?
2. Compared to similar programs, has the program applied leading practices?
3. Are there delays in the process that prevent the board from making timely decisions? If so, where are the delays and can they be mitigated?
4. Has the program implemented recommendations from previous evaluations?

Timing: Work on this audit has been delayed by issues surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. We plan to publish the audit results in winter 2020.



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