

1 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
2 UNITED STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
3

4
5 NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL
6 DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN
7

8 PUBLIC HEARING
9

10 May 31, 2007
11

12 St. Martin's University
13 5300 Pacific Avenue Southeast
14 Lacey, Washington

15 ORIGINAL

16 Taken Before:

17 SUE E. GARCIA, CCR # 2781, RPR
18 Registered Professional Reporter
19 of
20 Capitol Pacific Reporting, Inc.

21 2401 Bristol Court SW, Olympia, WA 98502
22 Tel (360) 352-2054 Fax (360) 709-6539
23 Toll Free (800) 407-0148

24 Tacoma, WA
(253) 564-8494

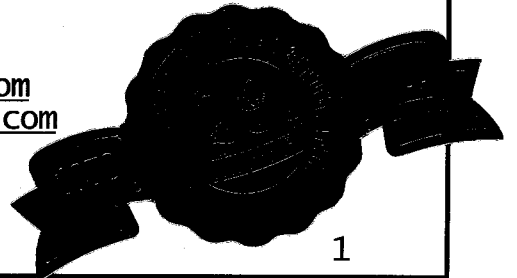
Seattle, WA
(206) 622-9919

Aberdeen, WA
(360) 532-7445

25 Chehalis, WA
(360) 330-0262

Bremerton, WA
(360) 373-9032

e-mail: capitol@callatg.com
www.capitolpacificreporter.com



Northern Spotted Owl Draft Recovery Plan - Public Hearing

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1 BE IT REMEMBERED that on Thursday, May 31, 2007, at
2 6:38 p.m., at St. Martin's University, 5300 Pacific
3 Avenue Southeast, Lacey, the following proceedings were
4 had, to wit:

5
6 * * * * *

7
8 MR. RUESINK: We're on the record.

9 Good evening. On behalf of the United States Fish
10 and wildlife Service, I welcome you to this public
11 meeting on the Draft Recovery Plan for the northern
12 spotted owl.

13 My name is Robert Ruesink. The last name is
14 spelled R-u-e-s-i-n-k. I will be serving as the
15 presiding officer for this listening session this
16 evening. My role is to conduct this session in order
17 that we receive your comments accurately. I am not
18 involved in any decision-making regarding this issue.

19 Here with me also at the front table are the
20 following representatives from the U.S. Fish and
21 wildlife Service:

22 To my left is Dave Wesley. Dave is a deputy
23 regional director of the Pacific Region and the team
24 leader for the northern spotted owl recovery team.

25 To my right is Ken Berg; ken is the manager for

1 the western Washington Fish and Wildlife office here in
2 Lacey.

3 We also have Sue Garcia, our court reporter this
4 evening. And the purpose of having the court reporter
5 is to ensure that we do get an accurate transcript or
6 an accurate record of the comments and the statements
7 that you present here on the Northern Spotted Owl Draft
8 Recovery Plan.

9 Outside the meeting room you have seen information
10 written and display materials that are available about
11 the Draft Recovery Plan. There are also staff members
12 from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and
13 Bureau of Land Management available to answer your
14 questions and address any concerns or comments that you
15 might have about that Draft Recovery Plan.

16 At this point I'd like to introduce Dave Wesley,
17 who will give a presentation on the Draft Recovery
18 Plan.

19 MR. WESLEY: Good evening. Everybody hear me
20 okay? You hear me okay? Good.

21 Thank you all for coming.

22 First of all, what I'm going to do is take the
23 first few minutes of this public meeting and just give
24 you a little bit of a background in sort of how we got
25 to where we are today.

1 done. So we'll going to go ahead and walk through this
2 power plan first.

3 This is the critter that we're here to talk about
4 tonight, the northern spotted owl and the recovery
5 planning process. A little bit of a background. The
6 species was listed as a threatened species in 1990
7 under the Endangered Species Act. There was an
8 interagency steering committee or scientific group that
9 was formed to begin to do some of the analysis, and --
10 also in '90, and draft critical plan -- critical
11 habitat for the owl was designated in 1992, and a draft
12 recovery plan was also completed in 1992.

13 That draft plan was never finalized, and the
14 current administration at that time decided not to
15 proceed with the actual final preparation of the plan,
16 even though it went through the draft phase and into
17 the final phase. Our group hopes that that doesn't
18 happen to this plan. We hope that we'll be able to
19 complete it and get a final plan out.

20 In 1994, the Northwest Forest Plan -- and most
21 people that live in the Northwest are familiar with
22 happened in 1994 and that President Clinton and Vice
23 President Gore were out and they conducted some
24 meetings in Portland. And for a long time they got
25 together, and that culminated in the preparation of the

1 forest plan in 1994.

2 And in 2004, as part of our ongoing
3 responsibilities to update information with regard to
4 threatened and endangered species -- the Endangered
5 Species Act requires us to do reviews on a five-year
6 basis, and we contracted with an independent contractor
7 to do a five-year review of the northern spotted owl.
8 And they took that opportunity to go back and look at
9 all the science and the information that had been
10 developed since the 1992 draft and since the '94 forest
11 plan and consolidate and summarize all of that
12 information in a report for us in 2004.

13 So when we started our work in 2006, we felt that
14 we had a lot of good information on which to base this
15 plan. We used the information that had gone before us,
16 and a lot of the summary information is shown in these
17 documents that I just talked about.

18 So what is in a recovery plan? Well, a recovery
19 plan is basically a road map. It gives an opportunity
20 for to us outline and describe what we think is
21 necessary to take a species from either a threatened
22 category or endangered category and take it off the
23 list.

24 What does it include? Well, it includes a
25 strategy: How are we going to get there? What is it

1 that we need to be able to do to get there to get this
2 plan -- to get this species recovered? It has specific
3 objectives. what are those kinds of things? what are
4 the population numbers? what are the habitat? what
5 are the capabilities in regard to threats? And how are
6 we going to deal with that?

7 what are those objectives? we often have to
8 outline specific recovery actions. This plan lists 37
9 different recovery actions that are specifically
10 designed in all different areas, and I'll go through
11 those in that few minutes about what is necessary for
12 recovering of the owl.

13 And I need to advise you that the recovery plans
14 are advisory in nature. They're not regulatory. They
15 don't have any force and effect of law. They are used
16 by the government, by federal agencies, by state
17 agencies to help guide what it is that we need to do,
18 and certainly it's important information that's there.
19 But in and of themselves, they don't have any
20 regulatory authority or any regulatory responsibility.
21 They are what they are, and that is a plan, and they're
22 advisory.

23 So how did we get to develop this recovery plan?
24 we started in late April of 2006, just a little over a
25 year ago, and the plan was developed by a team, and

1 I'll describe that in a little bit. The plan was
2 developed with our original target date of completing
3 it by the end of September in 2006. The team came up
4 with one goal or one objective, one way to be able to
5 develop the recovery plan, and it was submitted to
6 Washington.

7 There was a group in Washington that reviewed it,
8 liked what we did in the first option, but also asked
9 us to come up with a second option with regard to how
10 you establish habitat. And I'll describe that second
11 option in more detail in a little bit.

12 That information then came back to the team, and
13 the team, along with a support team that we had that
14 was helping us that we called the IST, the interagency
15 support team, worked on developing revisions to that
16 plan. And in April of 2007, that plan was the plan
17 that you see before you and what's displayed out in the
18 lobby.

19 We're currently in the 60-day comment period, and
20 right now -- I've just -- we got approval today that we
21 will be announcing that the comment period is extended
22 for an additional 60 days. So the -- I know that many
23 people have been interested in making sure that their
24 comments were received. Currently the closing comment
25 period is June 25, but we're now going to be extended

1 that to August 24.

2 I encourage you, if you have comments to provide
3 us written, that you did it as soon as possible. It's
4 always better to get your comments in early. Just it's
5 a good idea to do that. But we will be officially
6 announcing it probably next week that we're going to be
7 getting -- I just got a call from the Washington office
8 today that the request had been approved.

9 And we also committed to having a public meeting
10 in each state. The act and the regulations
11 implementing the act don't require us to do that for a
12 recovery plan. But during the development of the plan,
13 we felt that it was important enough that we have an
14 opportunity to hear from the public and provide an
15 opportunity for that.

16 So we've -- like I said, we've done two in Oregon,
17 one in California, and this is the fourth we've done,
18 and it's here in Washington. And our goal is to
19 complete the plan by April of 2008. We think the year
20 from the date of publication will give us the adequate
21 time, and hopefully we'll be able to -- (coughing).

22 So what did -- the recovery team is basically a
23 guidance, and it's information, and it's important --

24 I think that just came on louder. Is it that
25 better? Yeah. Maybe I don't have to hold it now.

1 Amazing what a volume button will do. Fourth one of
2 these, you'd think I'd be able to do this by now.

3 But the recovery team is -- like I said, it's an
4 advisory group. And it's important to understand that
5 this was a service document. We did have a team, and
6 we did try to work by consensus, but we weren't able to
7 reach consensus in all areas. So the document that you
8 see before you is, in fact, a service document. And it
9 is -- what it is, it's represented by the Fish and
10 wildlife Service. It was informed by the deliberations
11 and the information that was provided by the recovery
12 team members.

13 The team did have 12 members. It was
14 representative of the five federal agencies that are
15 involved in land management and natural resource
16 management: the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land
17 Management, the Parks Service, the Fish and wildlife
18 Service, and I always forget the fifth one. Who am I
19 forgetting? The BIA. Thank you, the Bureau of Indian
20 Affairs, they were the fifth agency.

21 For the three states, we asked the governor of the
22 states to nominate the members of that. They were
23 selected in accordance to the service policies, so the
24 governors picked the members for the team; whether that
25 was from their forestry department or their wildlife

1 department, they were the ones that made the
2 recommendation.

3 And we also have representation from the timber
4 industry, and we had two folks from the conservation
5 community; so we felt we had a good balanced team that
6 represented lots of different interests.

7 And like I said, we deliberated for about a year.
8 We met face to face quite a few times. We met on
9 conference calls also a lot of times. As you can see
10 there, almost 30 different times we got together over
11 the year.

12 We also conducted three different science panels
13 to get the views of the scientists to see what they --
14 what it is they said about the plan, what were -- to
15 make sure that as much as of the plan that we could get
16 was based on science and the most current science that
17 was available to us.

18 We also had managers that were there that were
19 familiar with dealing with owls on the ground and how
20 you were going to go about doing that. And we used a
21 lot of information building from the existing studies.
22 There was a lot of information that was showing and
23 kept coming back with the idea that it is important to
24 have large blocks of habitat for the protection of the
25 owl.

1 we were looking at that, so that became a key
2 element that we looked into in preserving habitat and
3 looking for large blocks of habitat. How we go about
4 doing that is something we'll describe here in a few
5 minutes.

6 And peer review, we also felt that it was very
7 important for us to have peer review of the project.
8 And some of the plan, primarily right now the
9 biological portion has, already been peer reviewed by
10 the scientists. So we feel that stands pretty good.
11 And I will describe in a few minutes the other type of
12 peer review that we're in the process of doing right
13 now.

14 So what are the objectives? It's pretty much the
15 standard kind of a thing that you see in a recovery
16 plan. First of all, you talk about the populations,
17 what are the populations of the bird, and how do you go
18 about protecting them with regard to the fact that you
19 get sufficient populations that the species no longer
20 needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

21 well the species can't live in of themself, so
22 it's important to protect the habitat. So you need to
23 make sure that the habitat is there, that the habitat's
24 protected, and that the habitat is adequately
25 distributed throughout the range so that, in fact,

1 there is a place for these birds to live. So habitat.
2 And maintaining habitat, of course, is another
3 important element.

4 The third part is how do you deal with the
5 threats? What is it that's causing the species to
6 become a threatened species and hopefully not become an
7 endangered species? So how do you deal with those, and
8 how do you eliminate those threats or ameliorate those
9 threats to try to compensate for what's happening to
10 ensure that you can get the species recovered?

11 And one of the major threats that we came up with
12 as we were working through it is the threat from barred
13 owls. Everybody knows about what -- the impact that's
14 happened over the years with regard to habitat, but
15 barred owls was one of those things that came out. If
16 you look back in the literature, it's mentioned but
17 it's not mentioned near as much as the scientists
18 imposed upon us and recommended to us with concern
19 about the control of the barred owls.

20 Habitat loss, again, like I said, is an important
21 element. It's something that we didn't wanted to lose
22 track of. Maintaining the habitat and making sure that
23 it is provided there for opportunities for the bird to
24 exist is a critically important element.

25 But back to the barred owl, it is interesting to