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News Release



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Northern Spotted Owl Draft Recovery Plan Released

Two options are proposed for public comment until June 25 and four public meetings are planned

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft recovery plan for the northern spotted owl that identifies criteria and actions needed to stop the owl's decline, reduce threats and return the species to a stable, well-distributed population in Washington, Oregon and California. The northern spotted owl is protected as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

"This draft recovery plan provides a blueprint for recovering the northern spotted owl to the point it no longer needs federal protection," said Ren Lohofener, director of the Service's Pacific Region. "The strategy builds on the Northwest Forest Plan, which many people believe is the recovery plan for the northern spotted owl but is actually a conservation strategy for many species. The Forest Plan doesn't spell out the actions needed to recover the owl like this plan does."

Developed in consultation with a recovery team of diverse experts and representatives of federal land management agencies, the draft plan envisions recovery of the northern spotted owl could be achieved in 30 years at a cost of about \$198 million, if the final plan is fully implemented. Successful implementation, Lohofener noted, will involve participation from states, federal agencies, tribes, non-federal landowners and the public.

"Recovering a species takes time and significant effort from multiple parties," Lohofener said. "The draft recovery plan relies primarily on activities conducted on federal lands, but, obviously recovery is achieved best and most quickly with a team effort."

The draft recovery plan identifies competition from the barred owl, which is not native to the Pacific Northwest, as the primary threat facing the northern spotted owl. Barred owls are native to eastern North America, but moved west as human activities altered the landscape and suitable habitat became available.

Since barred owls are less selective about the habitat they use and the prey they feed upon, they are outcompeting northern spotted owls for habitat and food, causing spotted owl populations to decline. To better understand the impact of barred owls on spotted owls, the draft recovery plan calls for additional research, including the control of barred owl populations in certain areas of the spotted owl's range.

Controlling the barred owl is essential to recovering the northern spotted owl, Lohofener said. "Because the range and number of barred owls are expanding rapidly, our effectiveness in addressing this threat depends on immediate action."

The foundation of the draft plan is a network of owl conservation areas on federal land in Washington, Oregon and California, where a suite of 37 recovery actions will be focused. Proposed recovery actions range from controlling barred owls and conducting more research, to managing habitat for spotted owl nests and prey, to providing incentives to non-federal landowners to manage habitat for northern spotted owls. In addition, a variety of studies and monitoring efforts are called for in this plan.

The goal of the conservation areas is to support a stable number of breeding pairs of northern spotted owls over time and allow for their movement across this network.

The draft plan proposes two different options for managing the conservation areas on federal land, and the Service is seeking public comment on the two approaches. Both options are based on the same science and have essentially the same objectives, criteria and actions.

"We want to generate the widest possible discussion with the public on the best way to recover the owl," Lohofener said. "So we are providing two options we feel are equally capable of achieving recovery, while having different implementation approaches. We are genuinely interested in hearing which approach the public and other interested parties think will be most effective and why."

The options differ in that Option 1 identifies specific conservation area boundaries, or habitat blocks, in which most of the recovery actions and criteria will be targeted. Option 2 also relies on a network of habitat blocks but it does not identify specific conservation area boundaries. Rather, it provides a set of rules that would help guide the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in designating owl conservation areas. A map showing what the application of the Option 2 rule set could look like is included in the draft recovery plan for illustrative purposes. Recognizing the dynamic nature of forests and the need to apply adaptive management as conditions and knowledge change, the final recovery plan will provide a northern spotted owl conservation strategy to assist the Forest Service and BLM with land-use plan revisions.

The draft recovery plan envisions that recovery will be achieved – and the owl may be delisted – when there is a stable or increasing population, well-distributed across the owl's range, for at least 10 years and the threats from the barred owl have been reduced or eliminated.

An inter-organizational spotted owl working group would be established to coordinate implementation of the recovery plan and another working group would be set up specifically to coordinate actions to address the barred owl threat.

The draft recovery plan is the product of many scientific and natural resource management professionals working together, using the best available science. In developing the draft plan, the 12-member Recovery Team, representing federal agencies, state governments, industry and the conservation community, convened 28 times over 10 months and met with nearly 40 northern spotted owl scientists and managers. The draft recovery plan builds on a 1992 draft northern spotted owl recovery plan, the Northwest Forest Plan, a five-year review of the species completed in 2004, a recent 10-year monitoring report and all other best available science.

Recovery plans are not regulatory documents enforceable by law. Rather, they provide guidance to bring about recovery through prescribed management actions and criteria to determine when recovery has been achieved, and are often influential in guiding the land-use decisions of federal and non-federal land managers.

The northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis taurina*) inhabits structurally complex forests from British Columbia through the Cascade Mountains and coastal ranges in Washington, Oregon and California as far south as Marin County. The U.S. population of the owl was listed as a threatened species on June 26, 1990, because of widespread loss and adverse modification of suitable habitat across the owl's entire range and the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms to conserve the owl. A draft recovery plan for the northern spotted owl was completed in 1992 but not finalized due to the development of the Northwest Forest Plan, which amended 26 land and resource management plans (LRMPs) of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. These LRMPs serve as the basis of conservation for a wide variety of species, including the northern spotted owl. The draft recovery plan released today builds on the Forest Plan and solely addresses the recovery needs of the northern spotted owl.

The draft recovery plan can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/plans.html>. Comments will be accepted until June 25 and can be sent electronically to NSOplan@fws.gov, or mailed to NSO Recovery Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon, 97232. Hard copies and CDs of the draft recovery plan will be available by request from the same Portland address or by calling 503-231-2194.

In addition, four public meetings will be held to provide additional information about the draft recovery plan and to accept public comment. All meetings will be from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. PST. The meetings are scheduled for:

- **May 22, 2007, Roseburg, Oregon:** Douglas County Fairgrounds Complex Conference Hall, 2110 SW Frear Street;
- **May 23, 2007, Redding, California:** Redding Convention Center, 700 Auditorium Drive;
- **May 30, 2007, Portland, Oregon:** Oregon Convention Center, Portland Ballroom, 777 Northeast Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.; and
- **May 31, 2007, Lacey, Washington:** St. Martin's University, Norman Worthington Conference Center, 5300 Pacific Ave. SE.

Persons with disabilities needing reasonable accommodations to participate in the public meetings are invited to contact Angela Butsch at 1-888-812-5759 (voice) or 503-231-6263 (TTY), or angela_butsch@fws.gov. Reasonable accommodation requests should be received at least 3 business days prior to the meeting to help ensure availability; 2 weeks notice is requested for ASL/ESL interpreter needs.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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