

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release



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CRITICAL HABITAT REVISION PROPOSED FOR NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL

60-day public comment period ends August 13, 2007

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today issued a proposal to revise the existing designation of critical habitat for the threatened northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*). The proposal includes 1.8 million acres in Washington, 2.2 million acres in Oregon and 1.3 million acres in California, totaling 5.3 million acres.

The proposed designation includes habitat on federal lands believed to be occupied by the owl. The proposal is open to public comment for 60 days, until August 13, 2007.

The proposed revised critical habitat designation is based on the recommendations of the 2007 Draft Recovery Plan for the northern spotted owl and uses the owl conservation areas and habitat rule set identified in that plan. The network of conservation areas is designed to support a stable number of breeding pairs of northern spotted owls over time, distributed to allow for the movement of owls across the network. Additional revisions to the original critical habitat designation of nearly 6.9 million acres reflect information gathered through advanced mapping and modeling technologies, resulting in a more-precise definition of owl conservation areas, as well as changes in land-use allocations since the original designation in 1992.

“This proposed critical habitat revision is based on the most current assessment of the conservation needs of the northern spotted owl, as outlined in the recently released draft recovery plan,” said Ren Lohofener, Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “In developing the draft plan and the critical habitat proposal, we worked closely with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to identify areas on lands they manage that are best suited for owl conservation and recovery.”

The northern spotted owl was listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1990 and critical habitat was first designated in 1992. The species’ need for continued federal protection was confirmed by a scientific review in 2004.

The proposed revision to critical habitat was initiated in response to a lawsuit filed by the Western Council of Industrial Workers, the American Forest Resource Council, the Swanson Group and Rough and Ready Lumber Company.

Critical habitat identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations. For the northern spotted owl, these features include particular forest types of sufficient area, quality and configuration to support the needs of territorial owl pairs throughout the year distributed across the species' range, including habitat for nesting, roosting, foraging and dispersal.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area. Under the ESA, all federal agencies must ensure any action they authorize, fund, or carry out does not adversely modify designated critical habitat.

In addition to conservation on federal lands, habitat for the northern spotted owl may also be protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act such as Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements and state programs. Voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges managed by the Service and on state wildlife management areas.

All comments on this proposal are welcome, and will be carefully considered by the Service in making its final decision by June 1, 2008. Information and comments are being sought concerning the following:

- The reasons any habitat should or should not be designated critical habitat, including whether the benefit of designation would outweigh any threats to the species caused by designation;
- Specific information on the amount and distribution of northern spotted owl habitat, what areas that were, or were not, occupied at the time of listing are essential to the conservation of the species and why;
- Land use designations and current or planned activities in the subject areas and their possible impacts on critical habitat;
- Any foreseeable impacts resulting from the proposed revised designation, in particular, any impacts on small entities;
- Whether any areas should or should not be excluded from the revised designation; and
- Whether the proposal's approach to designating critical habitat could be improved or modified in any way to provide for greater public participation and understanding, or to assist the Service in accommodating public concerns and comments.

The proposed critical habitat rule was published in today's Federal Register. It is available for download from the Internet at:

<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/nsopch.html> or by contacting the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 SE 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266 (503-231-6179).

Comments and materials concerning this proposal may be submitted by any one of these methods:

- You may mail or hand-deliver written comments and information to Kemper McMaster, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, 2600 SE 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, OR 97266.
- You may send comments by electronic mail (e-mail) to northernspottedowlCH@fws.gov
- You may fax your comments to our Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office at 503-231-6195.
- You may go to the Federal “eRulemaking” Portal, and follow the instructions provided for submitting comments: <http://www.regulations.gov>.

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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