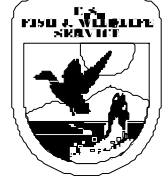


Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office
2600 S.E. 98th Avenue, Suite 100
Portland, Oregon 97266
Phone: (503) 231-6179
Fax: (503) 231-6195
<http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo>

News Release



For Immediate Release, October 8, 2009

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Contact:

Lee Folliard, FWS: 503-231-6179

Comment Period on Draft Safe Harbor Agreement Reopened for 30 Days Promotes Conservation Projects for the Northern Spotted Owl in Oregon

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today reopened the public comment period on a draft Safe Harbor Agreement and associated 50-year permit for the enhancement of the survival of the threatened northern spotted owl. The agreement and permit are designed to encourage forest restoration efforts on private land that will help recover the species. Notice of the comment period was published in today's *Federal Register*, and comments must be received by close-of-business November 9, 2009.

Copies of the draft Safe Harbor Agreement and associated 50-year permit may be obtained by contacting Lee Folliard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2600 S.E. 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, Oregon 97266; facsimile 503-231-6195; or by making an appointment to view the documents at the above address during normal business hours. The office phone number is 503-231-6179. The documents may also be viewed on the Internet through www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/species/. Written comments should be submitted to State Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, 2600 S.E. 98th Ave., Suite 100, Portland, Oregon 97266, or by facsimile 503-231-6195. Comments should include the name and address of the person commenting, and refer to the "Oregon Spotted Owl Programmatic SHA."

The Safe Harbor Agreement and associated permit cover the range of the spotted owl in Oregon and were developed in partnership by Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). ODF will hold the permit and enroll landowners with the assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

NRCS' Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP), a voluntary, working lands conservation program under the 2008 Farm Bill, will be implemented with the Safe Harbor Agreement for eligible applicants. The focus of HFRP in Oregon is to help landowners improve habitat for the threatened northern spotted owl on lands managed under sustainable forest practices. Landowners who elect to participate in HFRP will be able to enroll in the Safe Harbor Agreement.

Safe Harbor Agreements are designed to benefit federally listed endangered and threatened species by giving landowners assurances that additional future restrictions will not be imposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service on their land as a result of their voluntary conservation actions. In other words; landowners won't be punished for creating good habitat for endangered or threatened species through their management. To date, nearly three

million acres of land have been enrolled in Safe Harbor Agreements nationwide, benefiting a variety of listed species.

The Healthy Forest Reserve Program has been implemented in eight states across the nation, with Oregon added in 2009. This fiscal year, the Oregon NRCS has \$1.7 million for the program. Funding will be used to purchase permanent easements and conduct restoration activities on private working forests that are managed to benefit spotted owls. The Safe Harbor Agreement will provide regulatory assurances to landowners who develop suitable habitat through HFRP.

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Frequently Asked Questions

How Do Safe Harbor Agreements Work?

In a Safe Harbor Agreement, the landowner agrees to maintain, create, restore or improve habitat for endangered or threatened species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working with the landowner, will establish a baseline condition for each covered species (the spotted owl in this case). Proposed actions must be expected to result in a net conservation benefit to be eligible for enrollment in a Safe Harbor Agreement. The landowner may then incidentally take listed species, generally at the end of the agreement term, as long as baseline conditions are maintained.

Who Can Get One?

Any non-federal landowner can be a party to a Safe Harbor Agreement. These agreements are often between the landowner and the Fish and Wildlife Service or between the Fish and Wildlife Service and other stakeholders (such as state natural resource agencies, tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations and businesses) who work directly with landowners. In this case, the FWS proposes to issue a permit to the Oregon Department of Forestry and they, in turn, will assist landowners who wish to participate.

How long does it take to develop a Safe Harbor Agreement?

Many Safe Harbor Agreements can be developed within a few months. More complex Safe Harbor Agreements will take longer, depending on the species' ecology, size of the project, number of parties to the agreement, and funding available for the program. The programmatic nature of this Safe Harbor Agreement provides a framework that allows for a quicker, streamlined approach to facilitate landowner participation and enrollment.

What if I sell or transfer ownership of my land? Does the Safe Harbor Agreement go with the sale?

If you sell or give away your enrolled lands, we will honor the agreement, providing the new owner signs the original agreement or a new mutually agreeable one.

Can Safe Harbor Agreements be Renewed?

Yes, agreements generally can be renewed for as long as the landowner wishes and as long as the landowner follows the terms of the agreement.

What are the assurances?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide assurances that, when the Safe Harbor Agreement ends, the participating landowner may use the property in any otherwise legal manner that doesn't move it below baseline conditions determined at the onset of the Agreement. These assurances operate with the enrolled lands and are valid for as long as the participant is complying with the Safe Harbor Agreement and associated permit. In return for the participant's efforts, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will authorize incidental take through the section 10 (a)(1)(A) process of the Endangered Species Act. This permit would allow participants to incidentally take

individual listed species or modify habitat to return covered species levels and habitat conditions to those agreed upon as baseline.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov