

NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL
DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN PUBLIC HEARING

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC TESTIMONY

May 30, 2007
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

ORIGINAL

Oregon Convention Center
Portland Ballroom
777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Portland, Oregon

BEFORE:

MR. ROBERT RUESINK

Presiding Officer, USFWS

MR. DAVE WESLEY

Deputy Regional Director, USFWS, Pacific
Region, and Leader of Northern Spotted Owl
Recovery Team

MR. KEMPER McMASTER

Project Leader, USFWS Oregon Field Office

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18:35:06

1 MR. RUESINK: We are on the record.

2 Good evening. On behalf of the United
3 States Fish and Wildlife Service, I welcome you
4 to this public meeting on the draft recovery
5 plan for the northern spotted owl. My name is

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6 Robert Ruesink. The last name is spelled
7 R-U-E-S-I-N-K. I will be serving as the
8 presiding official for this listening session
9 this evening. My role is to conduct this

18:40:00

10 session in order that we may receive your
11 comments accurately. I am not involved in any
12 decision-making role regarding this issue.

13 Here with me also are the following
14 representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
15 Service:

18:40:14

16 To my left is Dave Wesley. Dave is the
17 Deputy Regional Director of the Pacific region
18 and the team leader for the Northern Spotted
19 Owl Recovery Team;

18:40:27

20 To my right is Kemper McMaster. Kemper is
21 the State Supervisor for the Oregon Fish and
22 Wildlife office here in Portland.

23 Outside this meeting room you have seen
24 written and display materials about the draft
25 recovery plan as well as staff from the U.S.

18:40:44

18:40:47 1 Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and
2 Bureau of Land Management that are available to
3 assist you and answer any questions that you
4 may have about that draft recovery plan.

18:40:58 5 At this point I would like to introduce
6 Dave Wesley, who will give a presentation on
7 the draft plan. Dave?

8 MR. WESLEY: Thank you, Bob. Everybody
9 can hear me? I'm going to come down and do it
10 from down here rather than stand up there.

11 First of all, I want to thank everyone for
12 coming tonight. What I'm going to do is just
13 take a few minutes and give you a little bit of
14 a background on the process and the plan

18:41:23 15 itself, give you some information that will
16 hopefully -- not everybody's had a chance to
17 read the entire plan. Some of these plans can
18 be a little dry, so I'll try to give you a

19 little bit of background about what's involved
18:41:35 20 with the recovery planning process, what we did
21 to get to this point, and some of the major
22 elements of the recovery plan. Then once we're

23 done with that, I'll turn it back over to Bob,
24 and we'll actually get to the public comment
18:41:48 25 portion of the meeting.

18:41:49

1 So once again, thank you all for coming.
2 I appreciate you spending your evening with us
3 here. I don't know how many of you are here
4 seeking air conditioning out of the heat, but
5 hopefully we'll all be able to spend some time
6 here this evening.

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7 Again, this is the critter that we're here
8 to talk about tonight. It's the northern
9 spotted owl. And what I want to do is talk a
10 little bit about the background.

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11 First of all, the species was listed in
12 1990 as a threatened species under the
13 Endangered Species Act. There was also an
14 Interagency Scientific Committee that was
15 formed in 1990 to look at the science behind
16 what was involved in protecting and making sure
17 that the spotted owl could be recovered.

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18 In 1992 the Fish and Wildlife Service
19 designated critical habitat for the northern
20 spotted owl. In 1992 there was a draft
21 recovery plan that was put together by another
22 group. That plan was naturally never
23 finalized.

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24 In 1994 there was -- the Northwest Forest
25 Plan was completed, and much of what was in the

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1 Northwest Forest Plan, some of the stuff in
2 there was designed for the recovery of the owl,
3 but the Northwest Forest Plan was a much
4 broader plan. It had to do with salmon,

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5 murrelets, many of the other larger species and
6 hundreds of the other species under management
7 survey. So the Forest Plan was a larger,
8 broader document that included much more than
9 just the northern spotted owl.

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10 And in 2004 part of our requirement of the
11 Endangered Species Act is for the Fish and
12 Wildlife Service to conduct five-year reviews
13 to see if the status of the species has changed
14 or whether it should be changed or what new

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15 information is available. We did a contract
16 with a private consulting firm, and in 2004
17 they did a summary of the status of the bird.
18 And what was nice about that is they took all
19 of the science from 1992 up to 2004 and

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20 summarized it for us.

21 So we had a great summary of the
22 information that was available to us, not only
23 from some of these earlier documents, but as
24 recent as 2004. So we had that wealth of

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25 information for us to start from.

18:44:01

1 What is in a recovery plan? A recovery
2 plan is basically a road map, and it's a design
3 that helps folks that are interested in
4 recovering the owl look at what is necessary.

18:44:11

5 There's four major components:

6 First of all, there's strategy. What is
7 it that we should do to be able to recover the
8 owl?

18:44:22

9 There are specific objectives. It talks
10 about population. It talks about numbers. It
11 talks about habitats. It talks about threats
12 and things of that nature.

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13 There are specific measurable criteria.
14 One of the things that a recovery plan is
15 essential to do is to establish some very
16 measurable criteria that we would know when the
17 species is eligible for delisting. So you
18 can't just talk about it increasing or this and
19 that and the other thing; you need to come up

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20 with specific, measurable criteria that we were
21 able to -- be able to enumerate so that a team,
22 hopefully a team in the future, when the owl
23 gets to a point where it is recovered, can look
24 at those criteria that we established and see

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25 if it's there to be able to be delisted.

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1 So the last thing is specific recovery
2 actions. The plan looks at what needs to be
3 done. And I'll spend a few minutes talking
4 about that in a little bit.

18:45:08

5 One thing I want to make sure that
6 everybody understands is that the recovery plan
7 is advisory in nature. It's not a regulation.
8 It's not a regulatory document. It doesn't
9 have any full force and effect of law like a
10 listing package or a critical habitat

18:45:20

11 determination. It is an advisory document for
12 both federal agencies, state agencies, folks
13 that are involved in owl recovery. What is it
14 that would be necessary? What's that road map
15 that's necessary for recovery?

18:45:32

16 So how did we get to where we are? What
17 was our time line? In the spring of 2006, we
18 started -- we appointed a recovery team. The
19 recovery team deliberated over the summer and
20 over some of the fall, and we delivered a plan
21 to the Washington office by 2006 and the end of
22 September. That was the original target that
23 we were asked to do.

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24 That revision -- or that plan was looked
25 at, and they were -- asked for us to look at

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18:46:05

1 some revision from some folks in Washington.
2 They asked us to come up with another option
3 that we had. Initially we had an option one
4 only. And I'll describe those in a little bit,

18:46:14

5 but we did prepare a second option at the
6 request of some folks in Washington that looked
7 at ways -- they wanted us to see if we could
8 expand a way -- we could do recovery in a
9 little different way. So we did do that

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10 revision. April 26 of 2007 we actually
11 released the draft recovery plan.

12 We're currently in the 60-day comment
13 period. It's normal for us to provide a
14 comment period for folks to be able to give a
15 comment during the 60 days. I know there has
16 been a significant amount of interest in
17 extending that because the plan is long. We
18 have gotten a request and we are in the process
19 of processing that request to make that
20 extension.

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21 I want to encourage you, if you do have
22 comments, to try to get them to us by June
23 25th. But all the indications I have right now
24 are we are going to be successful in requesting
25 the extension, and that extension will go to

18:47:01

18:47:03

1 August 24th. That will give a full 120 days.
2 So I don't have the final approval to be able
3 to tell you tonight, but I'm pretty sure. But
4 I would encourage you, if you do have written

18:47:12

5 comments, to provide them and get them to us by
6 June 24th.

7 We did commit -- the law doesn't require
8 us to have public meetings. They do require us
9 to have them for listings, but not for recovery
10 plans. But we felt it was important to be able

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11 to provide this opportunity for the public to
12 go out and do that. So we committed to
13 conducting a public meeting in each of the
14 three states. In fact, we've done two here.

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15 This is the second one in Oregon. We did two
16 last week: One in Roseburg and one in Redding,
17 California. And we'll do the same thing
18 tomorrow night up in Lacey, a suburb of
19 Olympia, Washington. So we will commit to do

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20 the four recovery -- public meetings.

21 And our goal is to have this plan
22 finalized one year from the date from which the
23 draft was originally published, or in April of
24 next year.

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25 Let's talk a little bit about the team.

18:48:03

1 We did appoint, as I said, a recovery team to
2 do this. The recovery team provided advice.

3 Let me make it clear that the document that's
4 been circulated is a service document. We

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5 really worked -- tried very hard to get
6 consensus everywhere, but we were not able to
7 do that in some of the issues.

8 So it is a service document, and we think
9 it certainly benefited from the dialogue and

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10 the interchange among the recovery team
11 members, but it is a service document.

12 We did have 12 members on the recovery
13 team. The five federal agencies that are
14 involved in land management in the Northwest.

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15 The Fish and Wildlife Service, the National
16 Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management,
17 the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Forest
18 Service are the five federal members of the
19 team.

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20 We had a representative from each of the
21 three states. We wrote the governors of the
22 state and asked them to provide us the names
23 that they would like, whether that was from
24 their game commission or the forestry

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25 commission. So we did have members from the

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1 three states.

2 We did have members from -- I'll get down
3 to there -- from the timber industry. We had
4 two members from the timber industry that were

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5 on the recovery team, and we also had two
6 members from the conservation community.

7 So there were 12 members. They were
8 selected in accordance with our policy to be
9 able to do that. And so that's the team.

18:49:21

10 And we deliberated for almost 30 different
11 times. Many of those times we met in person
12 for two and three days at a time. Other times
13 we did have conference calls where we got
14 together, and we had extensive conference calls

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15 to go over information and ideas and concepts
16 that we worked on.

17 We also did conduct three different
18 scientific panels and manager panels. We
19 wanted to get the input from the scientists,
20 that we wanted to try to base this on the best
21 available science and the most current science.
22 So we did have panels that were scientists that
23 helped us identify the threats and the actions
24 and the criteria that needed to be done.

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25 Again, we were building from the existing

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1 framework from the 1992 draft and from the
2 Northwest Forest Plan. And time and time again
3 it came up with the notion of large blocks of
4 habitat for reserves for the owl was something
5 that was very important. So we looked at that
6 and tried to keep that as a concept throughout
7 both option one and option two. And I'll
8 describe those here in a minute.

18:50:12

9 And we did commit to doing peer review.

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10 Some of the portions, primarily the biological
11 background now, has been peer-reviewed by the
12 scientists that were most involved in the
13 biology, but we also will be doing peer review.
14 We're in the process of doing that. We

18:50:37

15 committed to doing that during the development
16 of the recovery plan, and I'll describe that
17 also in another minute. There's another slide
18 on that.

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19 So what are the objectives of this plan?
20 It's pretty much the kind of things that you
21 see in other recovery plans, where, first of
22 all, you're talking about populations. You got
23 to have sufficient numbers of the northern
24 spotted owl, and those populations need to be
25 well distributed throughout the range.

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1 So, first of all, you've got to have the
2 populations. Second of all, you've got to have
3 the habitat that will support them. Much has
4 been made about the barred owl, and I'll talk
5 about that in a minute, but we don't want to

18:51:07

6 lose sight of the fact that habitat is
7 critically important. And we need to make sure
8 that we got the habitat and adequate habitat
9 protected to protect recovery of the owl.

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10 And, third of all, we have to look at the
11 threats. What are the threats that are
12 affecting the owl and what are the things that
13 we need to address that will reduce those
14 threats and minimize the impact those threats
15 are having on the owl so that we can eliminate
16 them in the foreseeable future?

18:51:28

17 One of the things in this recovery plan
18 that's highlighted that hasn't been highlighted
19 in the past is the impact that the barred owl
20 has had on the northern spotted owl. It was
21 identified through the scientific panels as the
22 threat that was the largest that we had at this
23 time. There's a recovery plan -- there's a
24 recovery plan portion of the plan that has
25 priorities assigned to the recovery actions.

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1 The actions associated with the barred owl
2 were the only ones that received priority one,
3 which means those actions necessary to
4 eliminate the likelihood that the bird could go

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5 extinct. So the actions associated with barred
6 owl were our number one priority. Habitat of
7 course continues to be important, but the
8 barred owl was number one. Habitat loss and
9 adverse modification, as this says, continue to

18:52:21

10 be a problem, but we also wanted to deal with
11 that.

12 Specifically, the barred owl, I mean
13 there's been a lot of information about barred
14 owls and the impact that they have, and one of
15 the recommendations that we have in the
16 recovery plan is to form a working group of
17 scientists and managers that will help us to
18 inform us of the kinds of research that needs
19 to be done and the kind of management that

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20 needs to be done, where any of these kinds of
21 actions should be taken, how often they should
22 be taken, when they should be done, and so on
23 and so forth, so we can get a handle on what's
24 happening with regard to the barred owl.

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25 Clearly we need to do some research. We