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REVISED CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today issued a final revised designation of critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act for the threatened northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) totaling approximately 5.3 million acres of federal land in the northwest United States. This includes the designation of approximately 1.8 million acres in Washington, 2.3 million acres in Oregon and 1.2 million acres in California.

The critical habitat designation is based on the draft and final recovery plans for the northern spotted owl. The resulting network of conservation areas is designed to support a stable number of breeding pairs of northern spotted owls over time and to allow for their movement across the network.

In federal forests west of the Cascade Mountains' crest, the designation overlays the owl conservation areas identified in the final recovery plan, released in May 2008. In fire-prone forests east of the Cascade crest, the critical habitat designation follows the owl conservation areas delineated in the 2007 draft recovery plan. This is because the final recovery plan, following the advice of expert peer reviews, adopts a broad-scale, "landscape management" approach to owl conservation in eastside forests and does not delineate specific conservation areas. By law, a critical habitat designation must delineate specific geographic areas.

These revisions of the original 1992 critical habitat designation, which totaled nearly 6.9 million acres, also reflect information gathered through advanced mapping and modeling technologies, which resulted in a more precise definition of owl conservation areas. Changes in land management since the original designation, such as Northwest Forest Plan reserves, also contributed to the new critical habitat designation.

"This critical habitat revision is based on the most current assessment of the conservation needs of the northern spotted owl, as outlined in the final recovery plan, which is one of the most extensively reviewed recovery plans our agency has produced," said Ren Lohofener, Director of the Service's Pacific Region. "In developing the recovery plan and the critical habitat designation, 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 six-year effort to update the northern spotted owl’s critical habitat designation by including recent scientific information and peer review 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 specific 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. This critical habitat supports 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. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. A critical habitat designation does not impose restrictions on private lands unless federal funds, permits or activities are involved. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure that such actions do not adversely modify or destroy 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.

The final revised critical habitat rule will be published in tomorrow’s Federal Register. It is available for download 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).

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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

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