



News Release

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DRAFT MEXICAN SPOTTED OWL ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (Service) has released draft reports on the potential economic and environmental impacts of a proposed designation of critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl. The owl's habitat varies from canyon to mountain forest habitats across a range that extends from southern Utah and Colorado, through Arizona and New Mexico, to the mountains of central Mexico.

The public is invited to submit comments on the proposed designation or the draft reports by April 26, 2004. In addition, an informational meeting will be held on April 20 in Las Cruces, New Mexico from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Corbett Center on the New Mexico State University, Jordan and University Streets.

When specifying any particular area as critical habitat, the [Endangered Species Act](#) requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Service may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless such action would result in the extinction of any of the species in question. The two analyses are prepared to assist in these decisions.

Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act to identify geographic areas essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations. 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.

The Service proposed critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl on November 18, 2003 in response to a court order. This proposal includes public and tribal lands in four states: 4,965,686 acres in Arizona; 569,125 acres in Colorado; 4,630,281 acres in New Mexico; and 3,322,452 acres in Utah. The draft economic analysis estimates that conservation measures range from \$ 0.9 to \$3 million annually. The analysis suggests that most of the expected economic impact is due to previous and continuing conservation measures that are not related to the critical habitat designation.

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Copies of the proposed critical habitat rule and draft economic and environmental analyses can be obtained from the internet at <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/NewMexico/> or by contacting the New Mexico Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2105 Osuna NE, Albuquerque NM 87113 or by calling 800-299-0196.

Written comments and information should be mailed or delivered in person to the above address or can be sent by facsimile to 505-346-2542 or by electronic mail to R2FWE_AL@fws.gov.

PLEASE NOTE: In the event that our Internet connection is not functional, please contact the New Mexico Field Office for assistance in obtaining referenced materials or to submit your comments by the alternate methods mentioned above.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, 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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

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 542 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource 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 governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov> website.