



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ANNOUNCES CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION OF 6.9 MILLION FEDERAL ACRES FOR NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced the designation of critical habitat for the threatened northern spotted owl. The Endangered Species Act requires, where practical, the designation of protected critical habitat deemed necessary for the long-term survival of a species that is threatened or endangered.

When compared to the original critical habitat proposal of May, 1991, the revised designation eliminates 4.7 million additional acres from critical habitat designation. Additionally, in contrast to a revised proposal issued in August 1991, the current designation saves approximately 1,000 jobs and returns 65 million board feet to the timber base annually. Further revisions to critical habitat may occur as a result of recommendations made by the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Team in its draft recovery plan, due to be released for public review and comment in February or March 1992.

"Throughout this complex process, the Service has made every effort in designating areas of critical habitat to take into

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account the importance of saving as many jobs as possible," said John Turner, Service director. "We recognize the profound impact of potential job losses and have sought to strike a balance between the interests of people and wildlife."

Critical habitat for the owl would encompass 5.7 million acres of U.S. Forest Service land and 1.2 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land in Washington, Oregon, and northern California. All Federal actions within critical habitat areas must be reviewed to determine if the action would adversely modify or destroy habitat deemed essential to the survival of the owl. The designation includes 2.2 million acres in Washington, 3.3 million acres in Oregon, and 1.4 million acres in California.

Under the Endangered Species Act, areas are excluded from critical habitat if the cost of inclusion outweighs the benefits of specifying those areas as critical habitat, as long as the exclusion does not result in extinction of the species. In the exclusion process, the Service removed lands throughout the three-state region in an effort to minimize the impact of critical habitat designation for the northern spotted owl.

Some of the employment impacts of critical habitat are expected to be partially offset by increased harvest from private lands that should be stimulated as local stumpage prices increase. In addition, Federal restrictions on log exports were increased in 1990; this is expected to make 600 million board feet of previously exported logs available to domestic markets. Approximately 25 percent of Pacific Northwest logs are exported (4 billion board feet in 1989), and local mills may be able to purchase some of those logs for domestic use.

"The Administration's goal continues to be achieving an appropriate balance between the need to protect the owl and the need to minimize job losses in the Northwest," said Turner.

The designation of critical habitat will be published in the Federal Register in mid-January and will become effective 30 days after publication.