

News Release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to Initiate Review of Northern Spotted Owl Status under the Endangered Species Act

PORTLAND, Ore. — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is commencing an evaluation of the status of the northern spotted owl, as required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

This review is the result of a petition to change the status of the owl from threatened to endangered. The review will also serve as the five-year review of the species as required under the ESA, and which was last completed in 2011. A five-year status review evaluates whether a federally protected species should remain listed, or if it meets the criteria for reclassification.

A petition from the Environmental Protection Information Center requested the northern spotted owl be reclassified from threatened to endangered under the ESA. The ensuing 90-day finding, which will publish in the *Federal Register* on April 10, determined the petition included substantial information that warrants further review, which automatically triggers a 12-month species review. The Service will not make any finding as to whether the status of the species has changed until after that review.

The population of the northern spotted owl, which is currently listed as threatened, is declining across most of the species' range. The most recent available data on the owl report a 2.9 percent range-wide population decline per year, although declines as high as 5.9 percent per year have been observed in some areas.

The two main threats to the survival of the northern spotted owl are habitat loss and competition from barred owls. Barred owls have spread westward, encroaching on spotted owl territories and out-competing them. While the Northwest Forest Plan has helped reduce habitat loss on federal lands since 1994, the threat from barred owls has intensified. Preliminary results from an experiment testing the effects of removing barred owls from select areas of northern spotted owl habitat show promise in benefitting northern spotted owls and will help inform this review.

“The best tools we have to prevent spotted owls from going extinct are continued habitat protection and barred owl management, both of which are recommended in the recovery plan,” said Paul Henson, Oregon

State Supervisor for the Service. “On a positive note, the experimental removal of barred owls is showing real promise, with early reports indicating that spotted owl populations rebound when barred owl populations are reduced. Our review of the spotted owl will tell us whether current efforts to address threats are sufficient.”

The Service will use the best available scientific and commercial information, including data from the barred owl removal experiment, in the review. To assist in the review, the Service is requesting input from the public and scientific community, including information on biology, possible threats, population trends and habitat conditions for the species. Information can be submitted electronically at www.regulations.gov, or by U.S. mail or hand delivery at Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R1–ES–2014–0061, Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Va. 22041-3803.

For more information on the northern spotted owl, visit <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=B08B>.

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