

News Release



Pacific Regional Office
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232
Phone: 503-231-6121; Fax: 503-231-2122
<http://www.fws.gov/>

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Contact: Brent Lawrence (FWS) – (503) 231-6211

Paul Henson (FWS) – (503) 231-6179

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Final Decision for Barred Owl Removal Experiment

Plan is designed to help northern spotted owl population recovery

As part of the comprehensive effort to help recover the threatened northern spotted owl, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has announced its Record of Decision for the experimental removal of barred owls from up to four test areas in the Pacific Northwest.

The Service has identified habitat loss and competition from recently arrived barred owls as the most pressing threats to the northern spotted owl. Barred owls are larger than northern spotted owls, more aggressive and have a broader diet, which makes them more resilient to declines in habitat quality.

Today, the Service announced its decision to use the Preferred Alternative as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. The experiment will remove barred owls from parts of up to four study areas in the northern spotted owl's range using lethal and non-lethal methods of removal, and then monitor the effect of such removal on northern spotted owl population trends. The Service plans to begin some barred owl removal this fall.

“We chose this alternative because it would provide for a strong, scientifically credible experiment with a high power to detect the effect of the barred owl removal on spotted owl populations,” said Paul Henson, State Supervisor of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office. “These test areas will provide results applicable across the range of the northern spotted owl in a timely manner.”

The Service will attempt to implement the entire experiment on all four study areas, but may implement the experiment on only a subset if insufficient funds become available to support the full experiment. Any subset would fall within the boundaries of identified study areas.

“We can't ignore the mounting evidence that competition from barred owls is a major factor in the northern spotted owl's decline, along with habitat loss,” said Service Director Dan Ashe.

“We are working with our partners to improve forest health and support sustainable economic opportunities for local communities, and this experimental removal will help us determine whether managing the barred owl population also helps recover the northern spotted owl.”

The experiment would be conducted on four study areas spread across the range of the northern spotted owl, including the Cle Elum in Washington, half the combined Oregon Coast Ranges and Veneta in northern Oregon, the Union/Myrtle (Klamath) in southern Oregon, and the Hoopa (Willow Creek) in California. Given the size and number of northern spotted owl sites in the combined study areas, this alternative would require an estimated four years of barred owl removal to detect significant results.

The Service listed the northern spotted owl as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1990. Based on the 2009 demographic analysis, northern spotted owls have been declining at an average annual rate of 2.9 percent rangewide.

Barred owls are native to eastern North America, but only recently arrived in the West. They were first documented in the range of the northern spotted owl in Canada in 1959 and in western Washington in 1973. The range of the barred owl in the western United States now completely overlaps with the range of the northern spotted owl.

If barred owl removal proves to be a feasible and effective method to increase spotted owls, the Service may consider using barred owl removal as part of a larger barred owl management strategy. This management strategy would involve a separate National Environmental Policy Act process. For more information about the barred owl Record of Decision, visit <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/>.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for fish, wildlife and plants and has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species, as well as promoting the recovery of many others. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Service’s Endangered Species program, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

Images of barred owls and northern spotted owls are available at www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/.

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