

News Release

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Determines Forest Management Pilot Project Will Not Jeopardize Spotted Owl *Agency Supports Federal Partners' Efforts to Advance "Ecological Restoration" Forest Management Approach*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a formal determination that the Bureau of Land Management's "Pilot Joe Demonstration Project," a timber sale that is part of an innovative forest management project in the Middle Applegate Watershed of southwestern Oregon, would not jeopardize the northern spotted owl. One of the overarching recommendations in the Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery plan for the spotted owl is carefully applied active forest management techniques that restore ecosystem dynamics and overall forest health.

"Despite continuing debates over forest management, something we can all agree on is our great Northwestern forests are in trouble and we need to restore their health to sustain all their different values," said Paul Henson, State Supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office in Portland, Oregon. "We've always maintained that what's good for the ecosystem is good for the spotted owl."

Noting that the project represents restoration-based forest management as described in the spotted owl recovery plan, the Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion on Pilot Joe states:

"The Service believes that strategically developed active forest management will provide more resilient forest habitats in the face of climate change and other stressors, which in turn has the potential to conserve spotted owl habitat on the landscape for longer periods of time. We believe the Pilot Joe project offers conservation benefits to the spotted owl through strategic placement of treatment units and development of late-successional emphasis areas. It should also benefit the ecosystem by enhancing ecological function and processes, leading to a more a resilient system in the Middle Applegate watershed."

Pilot Joe is part of the broader Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Project, which involves restoration treatments on 899 acres. Pilot Joe includes 300 of those acres and a timber sale that BLM anticipates will yield 1.5 million board feet. This is within an area of non-reserved land under the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Endangered Species Act requires federal agencies consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service when their proposed actions could affect a species listed as threatened or endangered. The Fish and Wildlife Service determines whether or not a proposed action would jeopardize the species' overall existence, issuing either a "jeopardy" or "no jeopardy" finding, called a biological opinion. However, the goal of the consultation process is actually to avoid "jeopardy" findings—the process allows agencies to work together proactively to tailor actions to achieve agency goals without increasing threats to listed species.

For example, based on consultation records over the last three years in Oregon, the Fish and Wildlife Service consulted with other federal agencies on around 50 projects per year, about 20 of which were forest management projects by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, and none of which resulted in a "jeopardy" biological opinion.

In December 2010, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar set in motion a plan to apply the principles of ecological restoration, as developed by Drs. Norm Johnson and Jerry Franklin, on BLM lands within the Coos Bay, Roseburg, and Medford Districts in southwestern Oregon. Drs. Johnson and Franklin are well known forestry professors and were among the lead architects of the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan.

Over the last several months, BLM has been developing three forest management pilot projects in southwestern Oregon to demonstrate the ecological restoration forest management approach. These are the Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Project in BLM's Medford District, the Coos Bay Wagon Road Pilot Project, and the Roseburg Pilot Project. Pilot projects are intended to inform public dialogue on development of future management policy for BLM-managed forests in western Oregon. The Fish and Wildlife Service has been lending expertise and technical assistance to BLM as the pilot projects have progressed.

For more information on northern spotted owl recovery and the Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts to support forest conservation in Oregon, visit www.fws.gov/oregonfwo.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is working to actively engage 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, go to <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

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