Forest Conservation in the Pacific Northwest

**Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan:** We are working to recover the threatened northern spotted owl in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and many other partners. The spotted owl recovery plan makes three overarching recommendations:

- **To protect the best of the spotted owl’s remaining habitat,** we recommend conserving spotted owl sites and high quality habitat across the landscape. This means the habitat protections provided under land use plans on federal lands will continue to be a focus of recovery, but protection of other areas is likely needed to achieve full success (including some areas previously slated for timber production on federal lands, and possibly some non-federal lands in certain parts of the owl’s range where federal lands are limited).

- **To revitalize forest ecosystems through active management,** we recommend actions that make forest ecosystems healthier and more resilient to the effects of climate change and catastrophic wildfire, disease, and insect outbreaks. This involves an “ecological forestry” approach in certain areas, which may include carefully applied prescriptions such as fuels treatment to reduce the threat of severe fires, thinning to help older trees grow faster, and restoration to enhance habitat and return the natural dynamics of a healthy forest landscape. We also recommend continually evaluating and refining active forest management techniques.

- **To reduce competition from the encroaching barred owl,** we recommend managing barred owl populations to give the spotted owl a chance to rebound enough that the two species may eventually be able to co-exist. To test the effectiveness and feasibility of barred owl management, we are proposing experimental removal of barred owls in certain portions of the spotted owl’s range to see what effect this has on spotted owls. If the experiment proceeds and the effects on spotted owls are positive, we may consider the effectiveness and feasibility of barred owl removal on a broader scale.

**Forest Pilot Projects in Southwest Oregon:** We are lending expertise and technical assistance to the Bureau of Land Management for three forest pilot projects in southwestern Oregon. These projects are fitting with the spotted owl recovery plan’s recommendations for carefully applied active forest management techniques that restore ecosystem dynamics and forest health. In September and December 2011, respectively, we made formal determinations that timber sales that are part of the Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot Project and the Coos Bay Wagon Road Pilot Project would not jeopardize the spotted owl. We are now in the process of making another determination relating to the Roseburg Pilot Project.
Proposed Revised Critical Habitat: We will propose a revised critical habitat designation for the spotted owl in Washington, Oregon, and California in early 2012. We have been coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management throughout the development process. Our recommendations for active forest management, as described above, apply to critical habitat areas as well—we are not advocating a hands-off approach in these areas (nor does the Endangered Species Act call for it). The critical habitat proposal will be available for public review and comment for 90 days. We also will provide an economic analysis on the proposal in May 2012 for a 45-day public review and comment period. A final revised critical habitat designation will be completed by November 15, 2012.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Barred Owl Removal Experiment: Early in 2012, we will issue a draft Environmental Impact Statement on the experimental removal of barred owls from certain portions of the spotted owl’s range to determine whether such removal would benefit spotted owls. The experiment is a major component of the spotted owl recovery plan. The options we’re considering include lethal and non-lethal methods for removing barred owls—and combinations of the two; all options are designed to minimize trauma, pain, and suffering. The draft EIS will be available for public review and comment for 90 days. If the proposed experiment proceeds, it would give us valuable information about how barred owls impact the population growth and dynamics of spotted owls. The experiment would allow us to gather information without being excessive, helping to assess the efficacy and feasibility of barred owl population management. We hope to determine whether the barred owl population could be managed to an extent that would allow the spotted owl a chance to rebound so that the two species can eventually co-exist.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office
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- Exploring solutions to climate change
- Recovering endangered species
- Forging conservation partnerships
- Promoting environmentally responsible renewable energy
- Lending our biological expertise to others

Our Commitment:

- We promote healthy Northwestern ecosystems that sustain wildlife and people.
- We seek common ground with public and private partners and citizens to advance conservation and support the well-being of Oregon communities.
- We meet modern conservation challenges with pragmatic, future-focused approaches that consider the broader natural and social landscape.

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