



News Release

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Service Announces Availability of Final Recovery Plan for the Mexican Spotted Owl

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is announcing the availability of the final Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan (Plan), first revision. The Mexican spotted owl was listed as threatened on March 16, 1993 under the Endangered Species Act. This species occurs in the States of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah, and south through the Sierra Madre Occidental and Sierra Madre Oriental in Mexico.

The Plan includes specific recovery objectives and criteria to be met in order to enable the Service to remove this species from the list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants. This Plan, based on the best available science, was produced by a recovery team which included researchers from the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station and the Service, as well as other federal and state agency representatives, and representatives from the Regional and Central Offices of CONANP in Mexico, covering the entire range of the subspecies.

“This revised Recovery Plan, informed by the experience we have gained since the owl was first listed, and the dedication of our scientists and partners, gives the Mexican spotted owl a significant boost toward recovery”, said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director for the Service. “The recommendations in this plan include management methods that will restore resiliency to SW Forests, making the forests more resistant to stand replacing fires, improving both human safety and owl habitat.”

Combinations of mechanical and prescribed fire treatments may be used to minimize risk of high-severity fire effects while striving to maintain or improve habitat conditions for the owl and its prey. These active forest management techniques will likely increase resistance to insects and disease, as well as enhanced productivity and vigor, which would help maintain populations of not only the owl, but its prey and other forest-dependent species.

Landscape level forest restoration, opening up more forest to treatments as this plan does, should provide economic opportunity and jobs with increased wood products becoming available. Nothing in the plan says that any area is necessarily hands-off. This will be determined on a case by case basis.

The objective of an agency recovery plan is to provide a framework for the recovery of a species so that protection under the Act is no longer necessary. A recovery plan includes scientific information about the species and provides criteria and actions necessary for us to be able to remove it from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Recovery plans help guide our recovery efforts by describing actions we consider necessary for the species' conservation.

The recovery criteria form the basis from which to gauge the species' recovery and subsequent risk of extinction. Recovery plans do not regulate federal agencies or their partners, but recovery plans are often adopted by federal agencies as sound environmental policy. Recovery plans do not obligate private landowners to implement the plan, and their cooperation is fully voluntary. When the owl meets recovery criteria, we will review the subspecies' status and consider removal from the List.

The Service completed the original recovery plan for the Mexican spotted owl on October 16, 1995. In the years since the 1995 Recovery Plan was written, the Service has learned a great deal about the owl's needs, the threats it faces, and some difficulties in implementing the original management and monitoring recommendations. This revised plan will incorporate the appropriate new information.

This revised Plan contains recovery criteria based on maintaining or increasing population numbers and habitat quality and quantity. The Plan also focuses on protecting existing populations, managing for replacement nest/roost habitat, managing threats, monitoring population and habitat trends, monitoring plan implementation, and building partnerships to facilitate recovery.

In addition to incorporating new information on Mexican spotted owl biology, revision of the ecological management units, refined recovery criteria, a threats analysis, and a survey protocol, the revised Recovery Plan has three major differences from the original (1995) recovery plan. These are:

- Switching from mark-recapture population monitoring to occupancy monitoring which, while not as robust, is much more feasible (and less expensive) to implement since capturing and banding owls is not required;
- Using Forest Inventory Assessment data from the U.S. Forest Service for monitoring habitat trends, which is essentially cost-free; and
- Conducting forest restoration within and around occupied sites (called Protected Activity Centers or PACs) to protect Mexican spotted owls from the impacts of wild fires. The revised plan recommends creating gaps in the tree canopy to slow the spread of fire from crown to crown. Crown fires are the ones that kill the trees, so the idea is that fire racing through the crowns hits the gaps and drops back to the ground, therefore allowing greater tree survival in the PACs where Mexican spotted owls occur.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific

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