



# USDA Forest Service Update

August 2011

## Subject: Northern Spotted Owl – Final Recovery Plan

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**Issue:** The Forest Service (FS) has been working across agency boundaries for nearly two decades on recovery of the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO), a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. FS shares U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concerns about the continued steady decline of NSO populations, which the revised final recovery plan states is due in part to historic habitat loss, current habitat loss and Barred Owl competition for NSO habitat and prey. We remain committed to improving ecosystem conditions for the NSO and other old growth-dependent species.

### Key Points:

- The FWS released a revised final recovery plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) on June 30, 2011.
  - Implementation of the recovery plan will likely mean reductions in harvest volume from FS lands, however the impact is expected to be modest. The exact impact is difficult to estimate, since the amount of project volume affected is dependent upon ESA, Section 7 consultation and future project locations.
  - In dry forest ecosystems, the Recovery Plan recognizes there may be short-term adverse effects to the NSO with long-term benefits. The Recovery Plan supports FS restoration activities in dry forest ecosystems.
  - The Barred Owl Work Group will continue to guide the FWS with implementation of numerous Recovery Actions addressing the barred owl threat to spotted owls. A DEIS is expected to be released in the fall of 2011.
  
- FWS is beginning a new effort to map critical habitat. They will be using a range wide habitat model developed to assist with this process. Additional details about the model are included in Appendix C of the Recovery Plan. The designation of critical habitat is on a fast timeline due to litigation deadlines, and a final designation is expected in November 2012. FWS has indicated that the action agencies will have the opportunity to work closely on the development of the critical habitat mapping process.

### Background:

The NSO was listed as threatened in 1990 and critical habitat was later designated on approximately 6.88 million acres of federal lands. The Northwest Forest Plan was implemented in 1994, in part to protect and enhance conditions favorable to late successional and old growth-related species. Demographic studies indicate that NSO populations continue to decline (~3 percent annually). Although the specific reasons for the decline are uncertain, there is increasing evidence that Barred Owls appear to be competing with Northern Spotted Owls for habitat and prey.

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