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Recovery Plan Unlikely to Save Spotted Owl Negative Impact on Local Communities Likely

PORTLAND, OR - The American Forest Resource Council has serious concerns about the Northern Spotted Owl Final Revised Recovery Plan released today by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The Plan fails to meaningfully address the threat posed by the barred owl and will lead to further reductions in sustainable timber harvests from both federal and private lands surrounding rural communities in Washington, Oregon and northern California without benefiting the spotted owl.

“The spotted owl will not recover unless decisive action is taken to control the barred owl,” said Tom Partin, AFRC President. “Unfortunately, the Plan offers nothing more than studies and protocols while proposing massive new restrictions on both federal and private lands.”

According to Eric Forsman, a leading owl expert and U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist, “Given that the barred owl is part of the equation, it's no longer clear that protecting habitat is going to do the job.” According to a [story](#) in yesterday's *Oregonian*, Forsman went on to say that “controlled removal of barred owls to determine if spotted owls reclaim territory would be a worthwhile experiment. . .but isn't financially or logistically sustainable.”

Estimates from the [U.S. Forest Service](#) and in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)'s December 15, 2010 comments on the Draft Plan predicted reductions in federal forest management activities by up to 90 percent in some areas. This is on top of the 80 percent reduction experienced under the 1990's Northwest Forest Plan.

In recent weeks, the BLM and Forest Service have backed away from the concerns expressed earlier this year, but neither the land management agencies nor FWS have provided any specific information. “Instead, the Administration offers hollow claims that the Forest Service and BLM can address the needs of these forests, local communities and local industries by thinning limited areas of primarily ‘plantation’ forests,” said Partin.

“The BLM will soon be out of plantation forests it can thin to provide even the inadequate level of harvest volume that has become the norm in recent years. The BLM Medford District is struggling to provide approximately one-third of the annual timber volume promised under the Clinton Northwest Forest Plan. This recovery plan will likely lead to further drastic reductions in available timber supply at a time when many rural Northwest communities face 15-20% unemployment and the remaining mills are hanging on by a thread,” said Partin.

AFRC is not alone in its concern over the impact of the Recovery Plan and the process used by the FWS. Last March, [Congressmen Schrader \(D-OR\) and DeFazio \(D-OR\)](#) and [Members of Congress Hastings \(R-WA\), Walden \(R-OR\), McMorris Rodgers \(R-WA\), Herrera Beutler \(R-WA\), Herger \(R-CA\) and McClintock \(R-CA\)](#) wrote to Interior Secretary Salazar expressing grave concerns about the process employed by the FWS and the potential economic impacts of the Plan. According to Partin, FWS' responses have been less than adequate.

“We will be reviewing the Final Plan more thoroughly in coming days to see if the FWS actually made any improvements over September’s Draft Plan. Unfortunately, we have low expectations moving forward on Spotted Owl recovery given this Administration’s abysmal record on improving the health of our federal forests or relieving the plight of our rural communities,” said Partin.

[Further information](#) on the Northern Spotted Owl Revised Recovery Plan is available at AFRC’s website www.amforest.org.