



For Immediate Release
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Contact: Tom Partin
503-222-9505

Draft Spotted Owl Critical Habitat Rule Continues Administration's Failed Forestry Policies

PORTLAND, OR - The timber industry is unimpressed with the Obama Administration's latest efforts to cloak its failed forest policies in the rhetoric of forest restoration, jobs and old growth protection. In a press conference, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and other Administration officials sought to downplay the impact of a new Northern Spotted Owl critical habitat proposal on rural Northwest economies by touting the promise of "ecological forestry." Secretary Salazar sounded the same theme last week in Medford, Oregon during a [tour to promote the failed "Pilot Joe" pilot project](#).

After President Obama was elected, the agency sought to abandon the 2008 spotted owl critical habitat rule in favor of a rule dating from 1992 which was based on badly outdated criteria. Litigation by the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) and others blocked that effort. The revisions announced today continue the Administration's policy of ignoring the reality of what is affecting spotted owl populations, including the barred owl and the threat of catastrophic wildfire, while pretending to be guided by "science."

"Habitat is not the current limiting factor for the Northern Spotted Owl, nor is historic loss of old growth," said Tom Partin, President of AFRC. "In fact, the amount of old growth on our federal forests is increasing while the spotted owl's numbers are decreasing. Yet, FWS wants to designate as spotted owl critical habitat hundreds of thousands of forested acres already taken over by the barred owl. This latest proposal assumes a nearly two fold increase in potential critical habitat—up from 5.3 million acres to 10 million acres—that will be included unless we can somehow convince FWS to *exclude* it. We are faced with proving a negative. That's backwards."

Meanwhile, the Administration has done nothing about barred owl predation and today announced another delay in even releasing an environmental impact statement for an experimental program that would take years to implement.

The critical habitat changes unveiled today abandon the long-time practice of defining critical habitat based on the physical characteristics of forest stands. If the proposal is adopted in its current form, critical habitat will be determined through computer simulation by relying on an untested and never-before-used set of attributes and information from an electronic geographic information system (GIS) that is widely recognized as incomplete, inconsistent and unreliable.

5100 S.W. Macadam Avenue, Suite 350
Portland, Oregon 97239
Tel. (503) 222-9505 • Fax (503) 222-3255

No one knows if the designated areas are in fact essential to spotted owl recovery, or if spotted owls even use them. Many designated areas do not meet the legal definition of critical habitat.

“Throughout the development of this critical habitat proposal significant concerns about the FWS’ computer modeling have been raised by members of Congress, federal land management agencies and private landowners with extensive modeling experience,” continued Partin. “The FWS ignored these concerns and opted to rely on untested computer models that defy common sense instead of concentrating on the known needs of the spotted owl.”

Partin noted that the Endangered Species Act requires FWS to consider economic impacts before the rule is finalized and allows for adjustments to soften its negative effects. “We hope FWS will seriously consider reducing critical habitat so that rural economies in particular do not suffer more than they already have as they try to climb back from their own near extinction as a result of the Great Recession,” he said.

Partin also commented on the Administration’s continued attempts to confuse the public about the effects of their failed policies on our forests and rural economies. “Last week Secretary Salazar was in Medford to tout the benefits of a small 1.5 million board foot (mmbf) pilot timber sale that is estimated to sustain approximately 50 short-term jobs for local residents and run a local sawmill for one week. They continue to ignore the thousands of jobs this Administration’s policies have cost us since taking office in 2009. Since then the BLM has fallen 146 mmbf short of awarding the timber it has promised, which has cost western Oregon approximately 5,500 jobs. Only in Washington, D.C. does 50 short-term jobs compare favorably with 5,500 lost.”

AFRC plans to review the draft rule carefully and in detail and hopes that it will be substantially revised before issuance of the final rule due in November, 2012.

The American Forest Resource Council represents forest product manufacturers and landowners throughout the west and is based in Portland, Oregon. www.amforest.org