



For Immediate Release
November 12, 2010

Contact: Ann Forest Burns
503-222-9505

Time Extension by FWS Insufficient

Portland, OR - The timber industry is expressing frustration over today's announcement by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) that the comment period on its [Northern Spotted Owl Draft Revised Recovery Plan](#) will not be extended beyond December 15. The original comment deadline was next Monday, November 15.

Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar received letters from several members of the Washington and Oregon Congressional delegations, including Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Cong. Brian Baird (D-WA), Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Norm Dicks (D-WA), Doc Hastings (R-WA), Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA) and Greg Walden (R-OR), expressing concern over the direction taken by the draft plan and asking that the comment period be extended a minimum of 60 days. A group of timber trade associations, including the [American Forest Resource Council](#), made a similar request of the Secretary and asked that another draft be issued once the work now being done by agency scientists has been completed, with an additional comment period to follow.

“It is difficult to understand why the agency is so reluctant to allow the public and other experts who are not employees of the federal government to have adequate time and information to review the revised plan,” said Tom Partin, President of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC), an association representing wood manufacturers throughout the West. “What’s the rush? It’s as if they are trying to hide fatal flaws in the plan.”

The Draft Plan, released September 8, 2010, abandons, without any technical analysis or scientific explanation, the work done in 2008 by an interdisciplinary Recovery Team. That work resulted in the creation of an updated Managed Owl Conservation Area (MOCA) reserve system, all on federal land. No owl habitat outside of the reserves was anticipated to be needed to recover the owl. This has been the approach of the federal government ever since the owl was listed as “Threatened” and the Northwest Forest Plan was adopted. The current Draft Plan targets all forestlands, both public and private, for potential restrictions.

The Draft Plan does not disclose the agency’s plan for a habitat conservation network, saying that FWS is “conducting a range-wide multi-step modeling process” that will be used to design a new habitat conservation network. AFRC believes the agency should issue another draft so there will be an adequate opportunity for public comment on both the validity of the modeling exercise and the resulting network, which could affect millions of acres of public and private forestland in Western Washington, Western Oregon and Northern California.

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

“While this modeling exercise may yield useful predictions on what the owl needs to survive, the public deserves an opportunity to fully understand and comment on the process and potential results within the overall context of the recovery plan. We believe the Fish and Wildlife Service should recognize this and delay completion of the recovery plan until this information is provided to the public,” said Partin.

The Draft Plan also fails to account for the impact of the barred owl on the spotted owl’s survival. It concentrates on maximizing suitable habitat on all forest lands. “As long as the impact of the invasive barred owl is ignored, it doesn’t help the owl to demand additional restrictions on more and more habitat. Suitable habitat is not the limiting factor and is not really the key to recovery for the spotted owl,” concluded Partin.

FWS cites a recent court order in litigation involving AFRC as reason for not further extending the comment period. FWS itself requested the short time frame from the court. AFRC favored a longer time to allow the new Recovery Plan and the Critical Habitat Designation that should flow from it to avoid the legal pitfalls of prior efforts by the agency.

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