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Forestry groups express continued concern over spotted owl plan

PORTLAND – Today, the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (Service) announced the opening of a 30-day public comment period limited to a technical appendix to the [Northern Spotted Owl Draft Revised Recovery Plan](#) released last fall. Forest landowners and mill owners expressed disappointment at the Service's failure to release other aspects of the current draft plan and skepticism about the time allowed. Further public review is sorely needed in light of the chorus of criticism raised by Members of Congress, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, the forest products industry, environmental groups and scientific peer reviewers.

The agency received nearly 12,000 public comments on the initial draft late last year. Many of those comments noted that controversial recommendations included in the previous draft lacked adequate transparency and scientific rigor. Following similar criticisms from federal land management agencies, the Service indicated that it was working to address these concerns. It is unclear if the public will get an opportunity to see how the Service has responded to these serious shortcomings.

“We know the Service has made changes to key provisions of the Draft Revised Recovery Plan in response to concerns of federal land management agencies. We've raised the same concerns. We don't understand why those revisions aren't being released to the public now so we can comment before they are final. Why isn't the Service willing to hear what the public has to say?” Tom Partin, President of the [American Forest Resource Council](#), asked.

The initial draft ignored the most up to date science for how the owl can be saved, proposed drastic restrictions on private lands and rural economies while failing to aggressively address the increasing risks of wildfire and the barred owl. “We hope the Service has taken into account the impact of the more dominant barred owl on the spotted owl's survival and that aggressive control measures are taken in the revised plan. Science is showing that setting aside even more habitat, including private lands, will do little to help the spotted owl, and may make matters worse by making even more room for the barred owl to flourish,” said Mark Doumit, Executive Director of the [Washington Forest Protection Association](#).

The Service should utilize the latest scientific modeling as a basis for policy changes. “It is important that we allow the scientists to complete their process before making management recommendations that will affect thousands of people in rural communities, already struggling from the Great Recession. Hopefully, we will see that reflected in the new information in Appendix C,” said Ray Wilkeson, President of the [Oregon Forest Industries Council](#).

[California Forestry Association](#) President David Bischel stated, “Ironically, some of the most robust populations of Northern Spotted Owls occupy sustainably managed private forests of Northern California. The first draft of the recovery plan completely ignored the positive benefits provided by pro-active forest management. We hope the Service recognizes the proactive measures that private and state landowners have already made towards owl conservation, and not add more regulatory gridlock.”

“We urge the agency to engage the public fully, learn from and respond to the concerns raised in the public comments, and pursue an approach that recognizes and rewards good forest stewardship and the many well paying jobs it supports throughout the region,” said David Tenny, President and CEO of the [National Alliance of Forest Owners](#).

Last September, the Fish and Wildlife Service told a DC District Judge it could complete the Recovery Plan by June 1. The forestry groups hope the agency will take as much time as necessary to issue a plan based on sound science and solid data. Peer review of any scientific modeling and other aspects of the plan would be essential to that effort. Unfortunately, a 30 day comment period limited to one aspect of the plan is unlikely to be enough. “We hope the agency will ask the Court for additional time to complete the Recovery Plan. That way, whatever comments come from the public can be used and not just ignored,” said Tom Partin. The American Forest Resource Council is a Plaintiff in the DC District Court case challenging the 2008 Recovery Plan.

About the forestry groups

The **National Alliance of Forest Owners** represents private forest landowners owning or managing 79 million acres in 47 states. www.nafoalliance.org

The **American Forest Resource Council** represents 80 forest product manufacturers and forest landowners in the West. www.amforest.org

The **California Forestry Association** represents professionals committed to sustainable forestry and the protection of the state’s natural resources. www.foresthealth.org

The **Oregon Forest Industries Council** represents more than 50 forestland owners and forest products manufacturing-related firms. www.ofic.com

The **Washington Forest Protection Association** represents private forest landowners growing and harvesting trees on more than 4 million acres. www.wfpa.org