

Northern Spotted Owl
Species Information and Chronology
August 2008

Species Information:

The northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) is a medium-sized owl and the largest of three subspecies of spotted owls currently recognized by the American Ornithologists' Union. It is dark brown with a barred tail and white spots on the head and breast, and has dark brown eyes surrounded by prominent facial disks. Non-migratory and highly territorial, northern spotted owls generally remain in the same areas throughout the year but they will expand their territories in fall and winter when prey becomes harder to find. The current range of the northern spotted owl extends from southwest British Columbia through the Cascade Mountains, coastal ranges and intervening forested lands in Washington, Oregon and California, as far south as Marin County. Spotted owls feed primarily on northern flying squirrels in the northern western hemlock/Douglas-fir forests and dusky-footed woodrats in the southern, drier, mixed-conifer/mixed-evergreen forests. They will also prey on other small mammals, birds, reptiles and insects. Spotted owls generally rely on older forested habitats that contain the structures and characteristics required for nesting, roosting, and foraging. Like most species of owls, spotted owls do not build nests. They nest in cavities or on platforms in large trees in nests built by other species. They are primarily nocturnal and they mate for life.

Chronology:

On June 26, 1990, the northern spotted owl was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act

On January 15, 1992, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a final rule designating 6,887,000 acres of federal lands in Washington, Oregon, and California as critical habitat for the northern spotted owl (57 FR 1796).

In December 1992, we completed the Final Draft Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl in Washington, Oregon, and California. This plan was never finalized.

This plan was never finalized, however, and a new draft recovery plan was released in April 2007 (USFWS 2007; 72 FR 20865). The final Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl was released on May 16, 2008 (USFWS 2008).

On January 13, 2003, we entered into a settlement agreement with the American Forest Resources Council, Western Council of Industrial Workers, Swanson Group Inc., and Rough & Ready Lumber Company to conduct a 5-year status review of the northern spotted owl and consider potential revisions to its critical habitat.

On April 21, 2003, we published a notice initiating the 5-year review of the northern spotted owl (68 FR 19569).

On July 25, 2003, we published a second information request for the 5-year review. We contracted a comprehensive status review of the northern spotted owl to provide the best available scientific information for the 5-year review.

In September 2004, the status review report was completed and continues to serve as the most current comprehensive summary of scientific information on the northern spotted owl (Courtney et al. 2004).

On November 15, 2004, we completed the 5-year review, concluding that the northern spotted owl should remain listed as a threatened species under the ESA.

On June 12, 2007, we published a proposed revised critical habitat designation of 5.3 million acres.

On May 21, 2008, we published a notice announcing the availability of a draft economic analysis and the reopening of the public comment period on the proposed revised critical habitat designation (73 FR 29471). This notice also alerted the public of the opportunity to comment on the proposed revision of critical habitat in the context of the recently released final recovery plan. The comment period closed on June 20, 2008.

On August 13, 2008, we published the final revised critical habitat designation of 5.3 million acres in the Federal Register.