U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Evaluating Options for Barred Owl Mangment

## *Facts, Questions and Answers*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified competition from barred owls as one of two main threats to the continued survival of the northern spotted owl; habitat loss being the other. About one-third of the Service's Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan focuses on addressing the threat of the encroaching barred owls, which now outnumber spotted owls in many portions of their range.

Barred owls are native to eastern North America and are believed to have begun moving westward around the turn of the 20th century due to human creation of new habitat that allowed them to expand across the Great Plains. Larger, more aggressive and more adaptable than the northern spotted owl, barred owls are known to displace spotted owls, disrupt their nesting and compete with them for food. Researchers have also observed instances of barred owls interbreeding with or killing spotted owls.

The Service is proposing to conduct experimental removal of barred owls from certain areas throughout the spotted owl's range to test the effect of such removal on spotted owl population trends. A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) outlines options for removing barred owls by lethal or non-lethal methods, such as capturing and relocating or placing in permanent captivity. If the experiment proceeds and the effects on spotted owls are positive, the Service may consider the feasibility and likely effectiveness of barred owl removal on a broader scale. This action would involve a separate public review and comment process.

The draft EIS is anticipated in mid-March, with the publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. The Service will accept public comment on the proposal for 90 days. The Executive Summary for the draft is currently available at www.fws.gov/oregonfwo.

The draft EIS includes eight potential courses of action for public consideration, including one to take no action. Each option includes information on the experiment location(s), the estimated cost and duration, the approximate number of barred owls that would be removed, and any potential social, economic, cultural and recreational effects. If it proceeds, the experiment could begin as early as 2013 and would take place over a period of 3-10 years. Each experiment site would include a treatment area where barred owls would be removed and control areas where they would not in order to allow comparisons of spotted owl data before and after removal.

The experiment would help the Service to obtain and evaluate information on a small scale regarding whether barred owl management is feasible and effective. The experiment's effect on spotted owl occupancy, survival, reproduction and population trends will help inform future decisions on management of barred owls, with the goal to allow the spotted owl a chance to rebound enough that the two species can eventually co-exist.

For more information, visit www.fws.gov/oregonfwo. The site includes Frequently Asked Questions and additional background information on spotted owl recovery.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Service's Endangered Species program, go to http://www.fws.gov/endangered/.

*Barred Owl*
USFWS/ Ray Bosch

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