



August 19, 2009

Robyn Thorson  
Pacific Regional Director  
US Fish and Wildlife Service:

Dear Director Thorson:

This letter is from the Washington Forest Practices Board's Northern Spotted Owl Policy Working Group, which represents various timber, conservation, and government interests. Our group also serves as Washington's Non-Federal Landowners Work Group of the USFWS Spotted Owl Recovery Plan Implementation Structure. Our charter asks us to recommend measures that will result in strategic contributions from non-federal lands in Washington to the broader goal of conservation of a viable population of northern spotted owl.

We request that the Service move quickly to understand the effects of barred owl competition and other impacts on the northern spotted owl (NSO), and ways to mitigate those impacts through barred owl control experiments in Washington.

Efforts to recover the spotted owl have largely been focused on habitat management strategies. Providing habitat is an essential element of any conservation plan but it may not be sufficient. While the application of conservation strategies have reduced the threat of loss of suitable habitat since the species was listed, particularly on federal lands, the invasion of barred owls is a potential threat of unknown dimension. In the 2007 Buchanan et al paper "A Synopsis of Suggested Approaches to Address Potential Competitive Interactions Between Barred Owls and Spotted Owls" scientists believe "...the consequences of the (Barred Owl) invasion are potentially dire for the Spotted Owl and that research and management actions, including the use of adaptive management, are required to inform the near- and long-term decision-making process for conservation of Spotted Owls."

There is an urgency and opportunity for scientists and science to help understand the barred owl problem. Because of the rapid spread of barred owls and the status of spotted owl populations through much of the region we urge you to move forward on barred owl control experiments immediately, using principles of adaptive management where appropriate.

The interests that underlie our group's support for initiating experiments are:

- Making a clear statement that there is adequate information to state that the barred owl poses a threat to the survival of the northern spotted owl in Washington
- Learning which mechanisms best address the barred owl impacts
- Obtaining more clarity about the future of barred owl/spotted owl interaction
- Supporting the conservation and future viability of the northern spotted owl population.

We appreciate your consideration of our interests and call to action.



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WASHINGTON STATE  
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES



Washington Department of  
FISH and WILDLIFE



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**



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