



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ACCEPTS APPLICATION TO CONVENE ENDANGERED SPECIES COMMITTEE

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan said today that he will accept the Bureau of Land Management's application to convene the Endangered Species Committee (ESC) to consider an exemption from the Endangered Species Act which would permit additional timber harvests on federal lands in Oregon.

Timber harvest on the lands in question had been substantially reduced as part of the effort to protect the spotted owl, a species listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Act provides that the Committee may exempt such protection if it is clearly shown that such action is in the public interest. Criteria for acceptance of the exemption request include having carried out consultations in good faith and fair consideration of reasonable alternatives and modifications, the completion of a biological assessment of the threatened species and that no irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources have been made.

The exemption was requested by Director Cy Jamison of Interior's Bureau of Land Management, which administers the timberlands in question. In his application, Jamison stated that present protection plans would reduce timber harvest on BLM lands in Oregon by 75 percent and cause major economic disruptions to area communities. He asked that 44 timber sales originally scheduled for 1991 be allowed.

Lujan said he "regrets that no solution to this problem could be found short of this action. The short term focus of the Act does not allow an analysis over the entire owl habitat. The action before me is a narrow exemption limited to 4,570 acres."

Under terms of the ESA, the Secretary, serving as Chairman of the ESC, has 140 days to hold a hearing to consider evidence on the exemption request and present a report to the Committee outlining the issues involved and a discussion of any alternatives.

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Following receipt of the Secretary's report, the seven member Committee has 30 days to approve or deny the request. Action requires approval by at least five members.

The Committee members are the Secretaries of Agriculture, the Interior, and the Army, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and a resident of the affected state appointed by the President.

Copies of the exemption application and related documents are available for examination in the Interior Department library, 1849 C St. N.W., Washington, D.C. Those wishing to purchase copies may have the entire 1,800 page document for \$221.00 or copy specific pages for 13 cents per page.

Within a short time this material will be available from the Superintendent of Documents and at all U.S. Government Depository Libraries.

Early this month the application and related correspondence will be available to the public in a laser image storage device in the Interior Library from 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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