

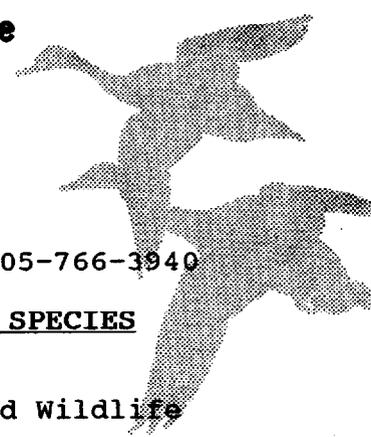


DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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News Release



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MEXICAN SPOTTED OWL PROPOSED AS THREATENED SPECIES

The Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) today proposed designating the Mexican spotted owl, a subspecies of the spotted owl, as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

In making the announcement in Albuquerque, New Mexico, FWS Southwest Regional Director Mike Spear said, "The slow but inevitable downward trend of the Mexican spotted owl's habitat base is of serious concern. It is imperative that the owl be proposed for protection now in order to prevent any further decline that could preclude recovery of the species."

The FWS was petitioned in December 1989 to add the Mexican spotted owl to the List of Endangered and Threatened Species. In March 1990, the agency determined the petition contained substantial information to indicate listing may be warranted. Following a review of the species' status, the FWS issued a finding in February 1991 that listing the owl as threatened was warranted. A threatened species is one likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

Today's proposal, the result of an intensive scientific review of the species' status, begins a year-long process during which public comments are requested. As a species proposed for



listing, neither the owl nor its habitat receives formal protection under the Act. Instead, the FWS regulations provide that a conferencing process will be followed which includes informal discussion between a Federal agency and the FWS regarding the impact of an action (e.g., a proposed timber cut) on the Mexican spotted owl and recommendations to minimize or avoid any adverse effects. The conferencing process for a proposed species is different from the consultation process for a listed species in that a conference report is only advisory to the action agency. A Federal agency must confer with FWS on any agency action which is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species proposed to be listed.

The owl inhabits forested mountains and canyons from the southern Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the Colorado Plateau in southern Utah, southward through Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas, and into Mexico. Its habitat is primarily uneven-aged, multi-storied forests with closed canopies. They also can be found in younger forests where remnant large trees exist.

Major threats to the Mexican spotted owl include loss of its forested habitat due to logging and fires, as well as increased predation and competition from other raptors due to habitat fragmentation. The FWS estimates there are over 2,100 Mexican spotted owls, and about 5.6 million acres of owl habitat.

About 90 percent of the known Mexican spotted owl population inhabits national forests, and another 9 percent is found on other public lands. More than 60 percent of the owl's habitat occurs on lands managed for timber production.

The proposal is to be published in the November 4, 1991, Federal Register, followed by a 120-day public comment period during which public hearings will be held. Hearings are tentatively scheduled for January or February in the following locations: (1) Alamogordo, New Mexico; (2) Silver City, New Mexico; (3) Flagstaff, Arizona; (4) Santa Fe, New Mexico; (5) Tucson, Arizona; and (6) Cedar City, Utah. Hearing dates and exact locations will be announced in the near future.

For additional information on public hearings and to submit written comments, contact Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services Office, 3530 Pan American Highway Northeast, Suite D, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107, 505-883-7877.