



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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SECRETARY LUJAN ORDERS ADDITIONAL COMMENT PERIOD
FOR DRAFT NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL RECOVERY PLAN

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan said today he will direct the recovery plan for the northern spotted owl be made available for additional public comment, deferring approval of the final plan to the incoming Administration.

"While the plan meets the Endangered Species Act requirement for recovery of the owl, I remain deeply concerned about the human costs involved in the permanent loss of more than 31,000 jobs in the Pacific Northwest," Lujan said. "In addition, consistent with the President's commitment regarding the transition to the new administration, I did not wish to take an action that might bind the hands of the next Secretary of the Interior."

Lujan directed the recovery team to complete the current draft of the recovery plan, and to publish it as soon as possible for public review and comment.

"The purpose of this is to provide the best possible information for use by the incoming President at the forest summit that he proposed for the spring of this year," Lujan said.

(more)

"The scientists on the recovery team have done some outstanding work," the Secretary added. "We are hopeful that their work will help in ultimately resolving forest management issues in the Pacific Northwest. Although there is no deadline in the Endangered Species Act for implementing a recovery plan, the issue must be resolved both for the sake of the owl and the people who are suffering hardships."

The proposed recovery plan recommends management of 5.5 million acres of federal land in the Pacific Northwest for owl habitat. It is based on a network of 192 conservation areas located on federal land and widely distributed across the range of the owl. The areas encompass a total of 7.6 million acres of federal land, 2.1 million of which are wilderness and national parks. Forest management guidelines for the conservation areas and the federal land between them also are in the plan.

Economic estimates in the plan place the regional cost of owl protection at 31,300 jobs, compared to levels of employment that might have been reached in 1995 if nothing were done to protect the owl.

Concerned about the impacts on jobs, families, and communities, Lujan in May suggested an alternative proposal to save more than 17,000 jobs that would be lost under the draft recovery plan. Congress has not taken action that would be required to substitute the alternative proposal for the draft recovery plan.