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Northwest Federal Forest Regulations Have Devastated Forest Health, Local Economies With Little Benefit to Northern Spotted Owl

Longview, WA – Today, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held an [oversight field hearing](#) in Longview, Washington on, “*Failed Federal Forest Policies: Endangering Jobs, Forests and Species.*” The hearing examined how federal implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan and Endangered Species Act has affected local economies, forest health and the Northern Spotted Owl.

“To put it simply, the Northwest Forest Plan has failed. It has failed the health of national forests. It has failed the economic well-being of rural counties and schools, has cost tens of thousands of Northwest timber-related jobs and the closure of hundreds of mills and affected wood-products industries. And, it has failed to recover the Spotted Owl,” [said Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings \(WA-04\)](#). *“Action must be taken now to protect rural communities and private property from these burdensome regulations.”*

“If the current path is endangering jobs, forests, and species, why would we double down on the policies in place? That’s precisely what the Administration’s current critical habitat proposal would do by locking off more public and private forest land from economic activity. The science and stories from today’s hearing revealed the need for a much better solution. We’ve got to balance our forest health and economy, otherwise spotted owls and jobs will continue to disappear,” [said Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler \(WA-03\)](#).

In 1990, the Northern Spotted Owl was listed under the Endangered Species Act and as a result, the Northwest Forest Plan was established. The Obama Administration recently released a new critical habitat proposal for the Northern Spotted Owl that would modify current management and place huge portions of Washington, Oregon and California off limits to economic development. [Vice President of Conservation for the Boone and Crockett Club Stephen Mealy](#) stressed the need for an independent review of the current management practices prior to the creation and implementation of a new, more restrictive management plan. *“Recent assessments of uncharacteristic wildfire risks indicate that the absence of active management to mitigate fire risks in such areas may be the greater risk to vulnerable species. Ironically, continuation of highly restrictive precautionary principle driven, short-term risk averse protection measures will likely lead to the continued deterioration of the very resources the environmental laws were intended to protect.”*

According to [Skamania County Commissioner Chairman Paul Pearce](#), the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl on the Endangered Species List and subsequent Northwest Forest Plan initiated “*wholesale destruction of an industry and economy.*” According to Pearce’s testimony, *“Beginning in 1992 with Critical Habitat, followed by the 1994 Northwest Forest*

Plan we saw the continued loss of timber jobs and infrastructure at an incredible rate. In 1990 there were 1200 jobs on the Gifford Pinchot Forest, 350 of them were forest service employees. There were four full time mills operating in my county alone. Today there are few timber jobs and only one full time mill.” Pierce also spoke of the blow to county budgets due to the restricted access to federal forests. In Skamania County, the “general fund budget for 2012 was cut from 14.5 million to 10 million. We face another 4 million cut in 2013. Like most public land counties we only have a small sliver of land available for property tax. ... Our unemployment rate is still near 12% with an underemployment rate much higher. Three counties in Oregon face insolvency. These statistics are true for the highly public land dependant counties in all three states and across the country.”

Dr. Hal Salwasser, Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University, outlined the costs and consequences of improper forest management due to loss of active forest management. *“[D]ue to lack of sustainable wealth creation from renewable resources, rising costs of fire management, threats to private, state and tribal forests from wildfires and insect and pest outbreaks and loss of wood processing infrastructure, federal forests are becoming a substantial liability to rural communities, western states, American taxpayers, and, in many places, non-federal timberlands. These are all unintended consequences of how environmental laws suited to the 1970s are interpreted and implemented, most notably the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.”*

Witnesses fear that the Obama Administration’s proposed Spotted Owl critical habitat proposal will cause further economic harm to already struggling Northwest economies with little to no benefit to the Spotted Owl. According to **Tom Fox, President of the Family Forest Foundation**, *“Designating additional acres of critical habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) as the U.S Fish and Wildlife suggest in their current public registry notice is the wrong path to follow. That type of action will only create disincentives for landowners to grow and maintain NSO or for that matter any type of species habitat. Forest land owners are getting weary of the federal services inability to work cooperatively with them, and see this current habitat designation as another misguided policy that will backfire causing additional species habitat loss across the landscape.”*

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