



# United States Department of the Interior



In Reply Refer to:  
FWS-R8-ES-  
2015-0139

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office  
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2605  
Sacramento, California 95825-1846

DEC - 7 2017

Dear Interested Party:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is responsible for identifying species in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). We received a petition January 9, 2015, from the Wild Nature Institute and the John Muir Project of the Earth Island Institute (dated December 22, 2014) requesting the Service list the California spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) as a threatened or endangered species under the Act and to designate critical habitat. We received another petition dated August 19, 2015, from Sierra Forest Legacy and Defenders of Wildlife requesting the Service list the California spotted owl as endangered under the Act and to designate critical habitat. We published a 90-day finding in the Federal Register September 18, 2015, indicating that the petitions presented substantial scientific and commercial information that the listing of the California spotted owl may be warranted under the Act. We are conducting a status review (12-month finding) of the California spotted owl to determine whether or not listing is warranted.

The spotted owl is a medium-sized brown owl with a mottled appearance, round face, large pale brown facial disks, dark brown eyes, and a yellowish green bill. California spotted owls are one of three subspecies of spotted owl that include the northern spotted owl and the Mexican spotted owl. California spotted owls are found on public forestlands and private timberlands throughout the Sierra Nevada, as well as southern forests in California. In our 90-day finding we identified several threats that may be impacting the California spotted owl. The potential threats identified include habitat destruction and modification, disease, inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, climate change, and small population dynamics. Additional information for this species can be found in our 90-day finding, available online at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) (FWS-R8-ES-2015-0139).

The Service has been gathering and analyzing available information about the California spotted owl to assist us in making a listing determination. We are required to use the best scientific and commercial data available for this process to ensure that our determination is as accurate as possible. We would like to coordinate with representatives of your agency as part of our information gathering, and relevant information will be incorporated into our Species Status Assessment report.

To ensure coordination with your agency in our data gathering, we are writing to request any additional information on the following topics:

1. Survey data, distribution, or occurrence information for the California spotted owl;
2. Ongoing and potential threats to this species and its habitat, including natural or human factors such as climate change effects;
3. Ongoing and planned activities within the Sierra Nevada and southern forests in California, including specific projects;
4. Effects of disease or predation;

5. Regulatory mechanisms that may be impacting the species, both directly or indirectly; and;  
and
6. Past and current conservation efforts for the California spotted owl and for other natural resources within the Sierra Nevada and southern forests in California.

In addition, we are seeking information to inform any future proposed critical habitat determination that we may make for the California spotted owl; we will only designate critical habitat should we find that listing the owl as threatened or endangered is warranted. Specifically, we are requesting information related to:

1. Habitat selection, use, and any changes or trends in the amount and distribution of habitat used by the California spotted owl;
2. Habitat requirements for feeding, breeding, and sheltering, including particular physical and biological features that are essential to the conservation of the species;
3. Geographical locations where such physical and biological features are found;
4. Whether any of these features may require special management considerations or protections;
5. Whether there are any areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species that may be essential to the conservation of the species; and
6. Possible benefits and impacts (including economic impacts) of designating any specific area as critical habitat.

We will provide a public notification of our 12-month finding in the Federal Register. Any future proposed rulemakings will include an opportunity for public review and comment. At this time, we expect the 12-month finding notification will be delivered to the Federal Register no later than September 30, 2019.

Please submit any relevant information to Madeline Drake, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605, Sacramento, California 95825 or by email to [madeline\\_drake@fws.gov](mailto:madeline_drake@fws.gov). All data and information submitted to us, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record.

Thank you for your continued interest in the conservation of sensitive, threatened, and endangered species. We appreciate your participation in this listing determination process. If you have any additional questions, please contact Madeline Drake, at (916) 414-6685 or by email at the address listed above.

Sincerely,



Jennifer M. Norris, Ph.D.  
Field Supervisor