

**File Code:** 1900; 2600**Date:** February 12, 2016**Route To:****Subject:** Clarification of Interim Recommendation for California Spotted Owl**To:** Forest Supervisors

This letter is a follow-up to my August 20, 2015, letter regarding the California Spotted Owl Interim Recommendations for Management, which transmitted the May 29, 2015, Draft Interim Recommendations for the Management of California Spotted Owl Habitat on National Forest System Lands (“Interim Recommendations”). The fact that the Interim Recommendations are in a draft form has been a point of confusion that I would like to clarify. I would also like to clarify a few of the recommendations that specify the use of particular stand exam tools.

In January 2015, a small group of scientists were convened in accordance with the October 2014 settlement agreement that resolved the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) litigation. These scientists were charged with developing short-term recommendations to address conservation needs for the California spotted owl in vegetation management projects while a long-term Conservation Strategy was developed. These scientists utilized a draft version of the California Spotted Owl Conservation Assessment as the basis for their recommendations.

Given that the Interim Recommendations were based on a draft version of the Conservation Assessment that had not been through peer review and that the Interim Recommendations reflected unresolved differences of viewpoints held by the scientists that drafted the recommendations, the scientists felt that the Interim Recommendations should be designated as “draft.” Furthermore, for months after the release of the May 29, 2015, draft of the Interim Recommendations, refinements and clarifications of the Interim Recommendations were considered. Because of the difficulty in finalizing the recommendations, the Region decided to utilize the May 29, 2015, draft recommendations to fulfill its commitment under the SNFPA litigation settlement agreement. Therefore, while the Interim Recommendations are still technically in “draft” form, the Region has treated them as final for planning purposes, as of August 20, 2015, the date I sent my initial guidance letter.


This letter does not change my direction to you to begin incorporating these recommendations into an alternative for any environmental impact statement or environmental assessment prepared for site-specific, vegetation management projects within the range of the California spotted owl on the Sierra Nevada National Forests scoped after August 20, 2015.

The Interim Recommendations include several sections where canopy cover measurements are discussed. Recommendations 2a, 6e, and 8d suggest the use of a specific tool – a densitometer. Developing a project alternative consistent with the Interim Recommendations does not require the use of a densitometer to conduct stand exams to develop that alternative. Rather, the use of



the densitometer would be added to stand exam measurements if that alternative were selected. The recommendation is that pre- and post-thinning canopy cover conditions be measured with the densitometer, not that the densitometer be used in the original stand exam. There is no need to re-do stand exams using a densitometer even if that alternative is selected. Therefore, current stand exam protocols should be used for project planning.

Finally, consideration of an alternative based on the Interim Recommendations should not be an all-or-nothing endeavor. If the ID Team and line officer conclude that full adoption of the alternative based on the Interim Recommendations would not meet the project's purpose and need, the project may still incorporate aspects of alternative based on the Interim Recommendations into other alternatives or the final decision, where doing so will meet the purpose and need, advance the conservation of the spotted owl, and meet the agency's goals for the project. Therefore, while the SNFPA litigation settlement agreement requires that at least one alternative be developed and considered that is fully consistent with the Interim Recommendations, there is nothing that precludes ID Teams and line officers from considering and adopting other alternatives that include some aspects of the Interim Recommendations, while not including others.

  
for RANDY MOORE  
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cc: Mary Beth Hennessy, Al Olson, Diana Craig