

Summary and Conclusions from the Barred Owl Workshop, Arcata, CA June, 2005

The Northern Spotted Owl has been the focus of intensive conservation efforts over the past two decades and is both a threatened species and a species of high public interest. The Barred Owl has invaded the entire range of the Northern Spotted Owl, and parts of the range of the California Spotted Owl, but has achieved particularly high numbers in the northern part of the Northern Spotted Owl range, where declining population trends of Spotted Owls are particularly evident.

There is strong correlative evidence for negative interspecific interactions between these two species. Several plausible hypotheses were developed by scientists engaged for the 2004 Northern Spotted Owl Status Review, concerning the ecological outcome of these interactions. Some of these hypotheses concern the potential extinction or severe reduction in the number of Northern Spotted Owls throughout the subspecies' range because of the Barred Owl. There are, however, critical uncertainties about the extent and nature of this interaction and contingent extinction risks.

Conservation intervention has been routine in the United States when a common species negatively affects (or has the potential to do so) either an endangered species or a species of high public interest. The Barred Owl is both a common species throughout its range and an invasive species in the range of the Northern Spotted Owl. It is recognized that a decision to exercise proactive research and management of Barred Owls in order to conserve the Spotted Owl has a social side as well as a biological one.

The group of scientists, biologists, and managers that convened for the meeting in Arcata, California to discuss this situation strongly encourages all responsible parties, particularly the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but also others entrusted with endangered species conservation, to engage in a vigorous program to determine, unambiguously, the impact of Barred Owls on Spotted Owls. The parties should use scientific studies (including experimental approaches) to test the link between declining trends in Spotted Owls and the presence of Barred Owls. These studies should be comprehensive, and carried out with appropriate extent and statistical rigor to allow decision-makers to evaluate the need for conservation action. To this end, we recommend 1) that a panel of experts be convened to develop and design critical experiments, and 2) that a programmatic research and management agenda/options be developed. An initial draft of the research and management agenda will be forthcoming as an additional outcome of the workshop.

It is imperative that we understand the situation involving the Spotted Owl and Barred Owl if we are to have any chance of developing informed options and making decisions on what action to take as we progress further down the road of Spotted Owl conservation and recovery.

The following workshop attendees (scientists, managers and other interested parties) support the above statement:

Kim Backes
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David Bigger
Scotia Pacific Co.

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The following individuals did not attend the meeting, but support the statements made above:

Jamie Acker

Andrew Carey

Jeffrey R. Dunk
Humboldt State University

Robert R. Pearson

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