

For Immediate Press Release

A Christmas Present for the California Spotted Owl

Federal Endangered Species Act Petition Filed

BIG BEAR CITY, California, December 23, 2014—The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today received a Petition to have the California Spotted Owl listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The Petition, filed by science-based conservation groups Wild Nature Institute and the John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute, is supported by numerous studies documenting that this rare raptor has and continues to decline precipitously in the Sierra Nevada and southern California. These population declines are a result of a long history of public and private lands logging in the mature forests where the owl nests and sleeps, as well as extensive post-fire logging in burned forest where the owl hunts.

“The primary threats to the California spotted owl are logging, competition with invasive Barred Owls, and expanding urban development. Forest fire is not the threat people think it is, yet logging on public lands in the name of reducing fire to save owls is rampant, and is having a devastating effect on this species,” stated Monica Bond, a spotted owl biologist who is an expert on the relationship between owls and wildland fire, and co-author of the Petition. “This is the only subspecies of spotted owl that does not have Endangered Species Act protection, even though its population is declining and it faces threats similar to those which resulted in the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl in 1990 and the Mexican Spotted Owl in 1993.”

The Petition describes five newly published studies showing serious declines of California Spotted Owl populations in logged forests over the past two decades, while the owl population was stable where commercial logging is prohibited. Other recent research shows these owls hunt for their small mammal prey in both green and heavily burned forests, yet the U.S. Forest Service and logging companies are aggressively cutting both green and burned trees, leading to the inability to maintain stable populations.

“It is estimated that there are less than 1,200 California Spotted Owl pairs remaining today, after having lost over a quarter of their population in the last two decades,” explained ecologist Dr. Chad Hanson of the John Muir Project. “Their populations continue to decline. Under any formulation of conservation biology the time to list this species is now.”

In recent years, the Forest Service and private companies have ramped up their efforts to log both dense, mature green forest and post-fire habitat, the very places that the owls like best. This includes the plan approved in August of this year to post-fire (*a.k.a.* “salvage”) log thousands of acres of essential foraging habitat within the territories of the 70 resident spotted owls that exist within the Rim Fire area today.

A copy of the *Petition* is available here: <http://www.wildnatureinstitute.org/spotted-owl.html>.

CONTACTS: Monica Bond, Wild Nature Institute, 415-630-3487, monibond@gmail.com
Chad Hanson, Ph.D., John Muir Project, 530-273-9290, cthanson1@gmail.com

Wild Nature Institute conducts scientific research on at-risk wildlife species and their habitats, advocates for their protection, and educates the public about the need to preserve wild nature.

The **John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute**, conducts scientific research on forests, fire ecology and wildlife, pursues litigation to protect imperiled species and works to educate the public about the importance of ecological management of our National Forests free from the conflicts created by timber extraction.