

August 28, 2025

Dear Representative,

I am a biologist who has taught and worked in the areas of ecology and conservation for the past fifty years. I am writing because I strongly oppose the plan by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to kill an estimated nearly half a million Barred Owls during the next 30 years, at a cost of around a billion dollars, to protect the Northern Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest and the California Spotted Owl.

Barred Owls are a forest species and historically were found only in the eastern half of Canada and the United States. The largely treeless Great Plains likely prevented their westward expansion. However, during the past century, due to fire suppression and plantings, trees became more abundant in the Great Plains and enabled the owls to expand their range west through southern Canada and the northern US, eventually reaching all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

In the field of conservation, it is common for people to believe certain species belong in an area (typically species that have inhabited the area for a long time) while other species (usually new to the area) do not belong, the latter often referred to as invaders. The fact is, due to the dramatically increased connectivity of the world, plants and animals (and people) are increasingly dispersing/migrating to new areas, as illustrated by the Barred Owls. The fact is, Barred Owls are now permanent residents of the Pacific Northwest and California. They are not going back. It is impossible to exterminate all the Barred Owls in a region, and even if it were possible, they would be rapidly replaced by owls immigrating from the eastern and northern populations. While it is possible to reduce the population size of Barred Owls through mass killings of the birds they would need to be continued indefinitely into the future, at huge financial cost.

The sheer idea of shooting half a million owls is deeply troubling to many, me included. These are not disease carriers threatening human health; they are birds whose crime is negatively affecting other owls. While no one wishes to see the Northern Spotted Owl and California Spotted Owl go extinct, their extinctions would not result in the extinction of the Spotted Owl as a species. The Spotted Owl consists of three subspecies, the Northern Spotted Owl, California Spotted Owl, and Mexican Spotted Owl. Mexican Spotted Owls are not being threatened by the Barred Owl. So, while the Spotted Owl could lose two subspecies in the worst-case scenario, the Spotted Owl species itself would continue to persist.

On behalf of the many citizens who oppose the USFWS rule to kill half a million Barred Owls, I respectfully urge you to support the joint resolutions to disapprove this plan, HJR 111 and SJR 69.

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