

I. **DRAFT Prioritization Principles**

A. **Guiding Principle:** the overarching goal for prioritizing treatments at the landscape and project levels should be to locate and design project treatments that provide for the long-term restoration and resilience of the forested habitat in which the spotted owl lives while avoiding or minimizing short-term adverse impacts to spotted owl habitat and individuals. The highest priority treatments are those that help achieve long-term restoration and resilience goals without causing adverse impacts to spotted owls in the short term. However, because the long-term persistence of the owl may require forest management that includes some short-term harm to owl habitat or individuals, the prioritization scheme provides for such treatments to be conducted when appropriate.

B. **Landscape-Level Treatment Prioritization:** In determining where on the landscape to locate vegetation management projects involving treatments that are likely to degrade or destroy high quality owl habitat, land managers should be guided by the prioritization scheme set forth below. When practicable, land managers should strive to avail themselves of treatment opportunities in higher priority levels. However, this Conservation Strategy does not contemplate or require that all treatment opportunities in higher tier priorities be exhausted before projects are located in lower priority areas. Indeed, in some instances it may be in the spotted owl's best interest to treat in areas that are characterized as lower treatment priorities (e.g., where there is an urgent need to treat an area within or adjacent to high-quality spotted owl habitat in order to protect that habitat from imminent harm).

1. First priority should be given to treating those portions of the landscape that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, but do not currently provide high quality owl habitat or include owl sites. The purpose of prioritizing treatments in such areas first is to provide for habitat restoration and resilience, while minimizing the risk of harm to owls. First priority areas are defined by the following criteria:
 - a. Significantly departed from NRV; AND,
 - b. At high risk of significant tree mortality from fire, insects, disease, drought, and similar agents; AND,
 - c. Lack sufficient acreage of high quality owl habitat to support one or more pairs of owls; AND,
 - d. Lack owl sites.
2. Second priority should be given to treating those portions of the landscape that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, but currently provide high quality owl habitat and/or include occupied owl sites. The purpose of designating such areas as the second priority is to provide for habitat restoration and resilience, recognizing that there may be some impacts to existing owl habitat from restoration/resilience treatments (some of which can be mitigated through project-level treatment prioritization and management recommendations, addressed below). Second priority areas are defined by the following criteria:
 - a. Significantly departed from NRV; AND,
 - b. At high risk of significant tree mortality from fire, insects, disease, drought, and similar agents; AND,

Commented [JLR1]: Ideally, these prioritization principles would: 1) provide conceptual guidance to land managers for project location and design; 2) help the CSO CS Team develop management recommendations based on these principles; and 3) provide the conceptual foundation for a spatially-explicit decision support tool that project planners could use to locate and design treatments.

Commented [JLR2]: May need to spell out the meaning and rationale for this phrase (and clarify that treatments that do not degrade owl habitat should not be constrained by this prioritization approach and that such treatments may be emphasized in or near owl habitat).

Also, need to clarify if this applies to just mechanical or all treatments. It's written to include all.

Commented [JLR3]: "high quality owl habitat" will need to be separately defined, likely based on the Step 1 owl model (and perhaps Step 2).

Commented [JLR4]: What constitutes an "owl site" will need to be considered and separately defined. Some criteria for consideration would include: 1) designation of a PAC that has not been retired; and/or 2) recent survey data (within last 5? 10? Years) showing owl use (and what level of use would qualify for designation of a site? Nesting?)

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- c. Contains sufficient acreage of high quality owl habitat to support one or more pairs of owls; OR,
 - d. Contains owl sites.
3. Third priority should be given to treating those portions of the landscape that are in moderate need of active management for restoration and resilience, but do not currently provide high quality owl habitat or include occupied owl sites. Third priority areas are defined by the following criteria:
- a. Moderately departed from NRV; OR,
 - b. At moderate risk of significant tree mortality from fire, insects, disease, drought, and similar agents; AND,
 - c. Lacks sufficient acreage of high quality owl habitat to support one or more pairs of owls; AND,
 - d. Lacks owl sites.
4. Fourth priority should be given to treating those portions of the landscape that are in moderate need of active management for restoration and resilience, but currently provide high quality owl habitat and/or include occupied owl sites. Fourth priority areas are defined by the following criteria:
- a. Moderately departed from NRV; OR,
 - b. At moderate risk of significant tree mortality from fire, insects, disease, drought, and similar agents; AND,
 - c. Contains sufficient acreage of high quality owl habitat to support one or more pairs of owls; OR,
 - d. Contains owl sites.
5. Lowest priority should be given to treating those portions of the landscape that are within the natural range of variability and are likely to remain resilient under a changing climate. If such general areas are selected for treatment for reasons unrelated to owl conservation, managers should follow the project-level prioritization scheme to maximize conservation benefits to the CSO.
- C. Project-Level Treatment Prioritization: In designing vegetation management treatments at the project level, land managers should be guided by the prioritization scheme set forth below. Projects should be designed to achieve restoration and resilience goals, emphasizing high-priority treatment types and locations. However, if restoration and resilience goals cannot be achieved by limiting treatments to the highest priority areas, managers should work their way down the prioritization scheme in order to design a project that will be effective at achieving restoration and resilience goals, while simultaneously striving to maintain the highest quality and most sustainable owl habitat.
1. Priorities for Treatment Areas: the following prioritization applies to vegetation treatments that cause short-term degradation or destruction of high quality owl habitat. Treatments that do not cause short-term adverse impacts to the owl or are likely to provide short-term beneficial effects are addressed in the section on Priorities for Treatment Types.

Commented [JLR5]: See above for priority criteria, unless we decide to use different ones at the project level

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- a. First priority should be given to treating those portions of the project area that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, but do not currently provide high quality owl habitat or overlap occupied owl sites.
- b. Second priority should be given to treating those portions of the project area that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, are within owl sites, but provide low quality or unsuitable owl habitat.
- c. Third priority should be given to treating those portions of the project area that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, and contain high quality owl habitat outside owl sites.
- d. Fourth priority should be given to treating those portions of the project areas that are in serious need of active management for restoration and resilience, and contain high quality owl habitat within owl sites.
- e. Fifth priority should be given to treating those portions of the project area that are in moderate need of active management for restoration and resilience, but do not currently provide high quality owl habitat or include occupied owl sites.
- f. Sixth priority should be given to treating those portions of the project area that are in moderate need of active management for restoration and resilience, but currently provide high quality owl habitat and/or include occupied owl sites.
- g. Lowest priority should be given to treating those areas that are within the natural range of variability and are likely to remain resilient under a changing climate.

2. Priorities for Treatment Types

a. General Principles

1. First priority, in all locations, should be given to implementing treatments that are likely to achieve restoration and resilience goals and also provide short-term benefits to the spotted owl.
2. Second priority, in all locations, should be given to implementing treatments that are likely to achieve restoration and resilience goals and be neutral in short-term effects to the spotted owl.
3. Lowest priority should be given to restoration and resilience treatments that have adverse short-term effects on the spotted owl. When short-term adverse effects to the owl are unavoidable to achieve restoration and resilience goals, follow the prioritization approach set forth above for locating such treatments so as to minimize adverse effects. [Also, apply site-specific management recommendations, set forth elsewhere, to mitigate short-term impacts].

b. Specific Principles

1. When restoration and resilience goals can be practically and effectively met through prescribe fire or wildland fire use, such management methods should be prioritized over mechanical treatments.
2. When mechanical treatments are necessary to achieve restoration and resilience goals, mechanical methods that retain key habitat attributes and minimize or avoid direct impacts to spotted owls should be favored over methods that negatively affect key habitat attributes and/or individual owls.

Commented [JLR6]: These could probably be further parsed based, but the parsing is already rather complex and detailed. Ideally, we would include enough parsing in narrative form for the managers to understand the ideas – and for the public to comment on them – but not so detailed as to cause confusion. The fine level of detail, which could include numerous layers of prioritization, would ideally be in a spatially-oriented decision support tool that includes multiple factors that could be selected/deselected.

Commented [JLR7]: Need to flesh out

Commented [JLR8]: More nuance may be needed here to distinguish effects to owl habitat versus direct effects to owls. E.g., there may be some treatments that have beneficial effects to habitat – such as burning or some limited thinning – but may have some short term negative direct effects due to smoke or noise disturbance.

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3. When mechanical treatments are necessary to achieve restoration and resilience goals and adverse impacts to high quality habitat is unavoidable, treatments that maintain habitat as suitable for some owl functions should be favored over treatments that completely eliminate habitat suitability (e.g., treatments should be favored that convert nesting/roosting habitat to foraging habitat, over treatments that convert nesting/roosting habitat to non-habitat).
4. Lowest priority should be given to mechanical treatments that render owl unsuitable.