



U.S. Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region

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California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Forest Service developing a conservation strategy for the California spotted owl?

The California spotted owl (CSO) has long been a species of conservation focus in the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service, with the species having been designated as a Forest Service Sensitive Species in the late 1970s. In July 1992, the Pacific Southwest Research Station published a General Technical Report titled *The California spotted owl: a technical assessment* of its current status. This document provided the scientific foundation for conserving the species for the last 23 years.

Since the publication of the 1992 report, a great deal of scientific information and management experience has developed that warrants a renewed look at the best means of conserving the species. For example, the proportion of stand-replacing fires and high severity burn patch sizes have been increasing in the Sierra Nevada over the last three decades (Miller et al. 2009, Miller and Safford 2012, Steel et al. 2015), and around 15% of PAC acres have burned since 1993 (Keane in review). Barred Owls populations have also now been detected in the Sierra Nevada (first detection 1991; Dark et al. 1998), have been increasing in recent years (Keane unpublished data), and have recently been implicated in the population declines of the closely related Northern Spotted Owl (Dugger et al. in Press). And, perhaps most importantly, California spotted owl populations on the three demographic study areas occurring primarily on national forest lands in the Sierra Nevada appear to have declined over the past 20 years, suggesting that this renewed look at CSO conservation is needed (Connor et al. 2013, Tempel and Gutierrez 2013, Tempel et al. 2014).

Given the importance of species conservation to developing and revising land and resource management plans (forest plans), a new California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy can help inform the forest plan revisions currently in progress and planned for the future.

What is the California Spotted Owl Conservation Assessment and how does it relate to the California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy?

The California Spotted Owl Conservation Assessment is a summary of scientific information related to the California spotted owl and its conservation. The Pacific Southwest Research Station has taken the lead to prepare the Conservation Assessment and expects to finalize it in fall 2015. The Conservation Assessment is not intended to provide management recommendations for the species, but is instead intended to provide a strong scientific foundation upon which the California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy can build to develop management recommendations and other tools to help conserve the California spotted owl. When it is available it will be posted to the Conservation Strategy [website](#) including a list of the references used.

Where does the California spotted owl live?

Most California spotted owl habitat is in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade regions of central California. There are also smaller and genetically distinct California spotted owl populations in southern and coastal California. The CSO Conservation Strategy will focus on the Sierra Nevada and Cascade CSO population. This range spans nine national forest units, including: the Eldorado, Inyo, Lassen, Plumas, Sequoia, Sierra, Stanislaus, and Tahoe National Forests, and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit¹. Any conservation measures generated by the California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy that may also benefit the coastal and southern California spotted owl populations will be noted.

Is the Forest Service collaborating with other groups to develop this strategy?

Yes. We will develop this strategy through a collaborative effort. The intent is to bring together experts, both within and outside the Forest Service, to ensure an effective strategy. Partners and collaborators include state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities, and Tribes. It is also important to work across boundaries by using data from multiple ownerships.

How can the public be involved in this process?

There are several ways the public can be involved in developing the California spotted owl Conservation Strategy. You can read the information on our [website](#), review materials and provide your input, [subscribe](#) to our e-mail list, and participate in events and forums we hope to have in the future to discuss the CSO Conservation Strategy.

What is the relationship between the California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy and the Endangered Species Act?

The CSO is not currently listed as a Threatened or Endangered Species under the federal Endangered Species Act. However, there are two petitions currently pending before the U.S. Fish

¹ The NV side of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit does not include any known CSO locations.

and Wildlife Service to list the species ([USFWS CSO website](#)). The Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for determining whether to list the species and will do so according to its statutory and regulatory processes. We intend to develop the CSO Conservation Strategy in close coordination with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and hope that the CSO Conservation Strategy will be useful in informing the Fish and Wildlife Service's listing process. Regardless of whether the California spotted owl becomes federally listed, the CSO Conservation Strategy will be designed to help protect and conserve the California spotted owl and the forests in which it lives.

How will the California Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy influence the Forest Service's management of National Forests in California?

We intend the CSO Conservation Strategy to offer management and conservation recommendations for forest managers to consider when planning activities and uses in national forests. We expect the Conservation Strategy to be adaptive and flexible to reflect new opportunities, lessons learned and the best available science. The Conservation Strategy will be considered in decisions on Forest Plans and projects.

What does the CSO Conservation Strategy mean for other species that occupy national forests where the CSO lives?

We recognize that all species and their habitat exist as part of a larger ecosystem. While the CSO Conservation Strategy's focus will be on a single species, the Strategy will take an ecosystem approach to habitat restoration, resilience and long-term conservation. As a result, the CSO Conservation Strategy should not only benefit the CSO, but also other species that depend on the same forests. The CSO Conservation Strategy will also integrate with other species conservation strategies, such as the [Pacific Fisher Conservation Strategy](#).

Will Barred Owl Removal be considered as part of the Conservation Strategy?

The Conservation Strategy will address many threats to the CSO and will require collaboration across multiple agencies. Habitat threats and especially non-habitat threats, like the Barred Owl, will necessitate working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as many others.

What is the 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework and the associated litigation settlement that was reached in 2014?

In January 2004, the Forest Service signed the Record of Decision for the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (Sierra Nevada Framework). The decision amended the Forest Plans for 11 national forests to improve protection of old forests, wildlife habitats, watersheds and communities in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Modoc Plateau. Visit our [website](#) on the Sierra Nevada Framework for more information.

In October 2014, the Forest Service and environmental plaintiffs signed a settlement agreement ending a decade-long legal battle over the Sierra Nevada Framework. The settlement agreement includes terms related to the development of conservation strategies for the Pacific fisher and the

California spotted owl, a memorandum of understanding for the increased use of managed fire, and analysis of forest plan components for post-fire habitat. Several of these efforts, including the development of a CSO Conservation Strategy, were in progress before the settlement agreement was reached. You can read our [news release](#) about the settlement agreement for more information.

What are the California spotted owl “interim recommendations” and how do they relate to the CSO Conservation Strategy?

Interim recommendations on changes to forest management specific to the CSO and its habitat were developed as a result of the Sierra Nevada Framework settlement agreement. The Forest Service is analyzing these interim recommendations in its forest plan revision efforts and vegetation management projects until the CSO Conservation Strategy is completed. The Interim Recommendations will be replaced by the Conservation Strategy. There is no plan to update the Interim Recommendations before the Conservation Strategy is completed.

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