

Citation of Work for the Mexican Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk and Old Growth

Operational Draft: This document is prepared to provide guidance to Forest Plan revision teams. As this guidance is implemented, we expect to learn improved ways to do this work. As we learn, this document will be updated. This document was reviewed and revised as appropriate in January 2010 to conform to the requirements of the 1982 Planning Rule provisions.

Background

In 1996, the Southwestern Region completed a regional amendment to 11 forest plans to add management direction for 3 areas of interest: Mexican spotted owl (MSO), northern goshawk, and old growth. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was prepared that analyzed the proposed direction and amended the forest plans. Subsequently in 2006, a Final Supplement to the FEIS and Record of Decision was prepared and signed to disclose, review, and assess scientific arguments challenging the Agency's conclusions regarding the northern goshawk's habitat requirements¹.

In 2005, the Region embarked on forest plan revision. Regional leadership desired that any revision of direction in the 1996 Amendment and the Supplement related to MSO, northern goshawk, and old growth, be addressed in a consistent fashion across the forests. A team, the MSO/ Goshawk/ Old Growth Working Group was chartered to investigate how this could best be done and to develop the regional guidance necessary to achieve this consistency while retaining flexibility for unit specific situations. Specialists from the areas of vegetation, fire/fuels, wildlife/ESA, planning, appeals, silviculture, and goshawk research were represented. The workgroup was directed to base their guidance on the 1996 Amendment, the MSO/Goshawk Implementation Guide, the Mexican spotted owl Recovery Plan, best available science, and recent MSO/goshawk/old growth project-specific plan amendments.

Development of Products

The team convened its first meeting in July of 2008 and met a total of 8 times for multiple day meetings in addition to having numerous conference calls. Several meetings included time in the field on various forests and discussions with forest staffs regarding challenges in interpreting and implementing plan direction related to these areas. The team also spent time in discussion with Bill Block of Rocky Mountain Research Station- MSO Recovery Team, academics from Northern Arizona University, and the members of the Ecological Restoration Institute. The team spent extensive time identifying and reviewing the most current science related to management in these areas and the resulting products were based on the best available science as referenced at the end of this write-up. After several discussions the team decided the best way to address the need for a consistent approach to plan revision for these areas was to develop region wide base level desired conditions for forested vegetation communities, customizable by unit (Forest) to meet their specific circumstances. These products describe the desired characteristics including structure, composition, and process of the communities that are sustainable over time and provide for the needs of the Mexican spotted owl and the northern goshawk, as well as for "old growth" as a sustainable forest component. Desired conditions were developed for the following forested communities:

¹ See *Center for Biodiversity v. USFS*, 349 F.3d 1157 (9th Cir.2003)

- Ponderosa pine (including bunchgrass and Gambel oak suotypes)
- Ponderosa pine evergreen oak (perennial grasses and evergreen shrub subtypes)
- Dry (frequent fire) mixed conifer
- Wet (infrequent fire) mixed conifer
- Spruce-fir (including lower and upper elevation types)
- Pinyon juniper
 - Pinyon juniper grassland / Juniper grassland
 - Pinyon juniper sagebrush
 - Pinyon juniper evergreen shrub
 - Pinyon juniper woodlands (persistent)

An introduction was also developed that provides the context, including concepts and definitions of terms, in which desired conditions should be construed.

The team presented their approach to the Regional Leadership Team in November of 2008 for approval, which was obtained at that meeting. Sample draft products were provided for review as well.

Draft products for each vegetation community were sent out to the forests for review and comment on several occasions between October of 2008 and April of 2009. The team reviewed and discussed each comment; changes were made as appropriate. Additional products were developed based on forest requests to meet unique situations that exist in more than one place across the region. Other comments were solicited from Regional Office specialists in vegetation ecology.

Each forest has the flexibility to customize these Desired Conditions and add to them to meet their unit specific situations as long as the intent of the overall direction is maintained. This will be done through a collaborative public process by each forest during plan revision. Adjustments will be reviewed by team members as appropriate to ensure that any changes are incorporated within the bounds of best science. The scientific references used in the development of these products are listed below.

References used in development of R3 base Desired Conditions

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