

Owls face extinction

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exist in their area. Although the different variations can be interbred or crossed, the local ecotypes can be defined genetically. The North Fork Willamette Douglas fir is not the same as the Coast Range Douglas fir.

In the process of reforestation, the local ecotypes are often replaced by trees genetically selected for their growth values or super-tree qualities. These trees may be more susceptible to disease and over a period of time may drain the soils of nutrients. Very little research has been done on what will occur when one genetic strain of tree species is repeatedly grown on the same site.

An example of what happened in Europe that could happen here was offered by Brock Evans of the Sierra Club. "In West Germany, the third generation spruce caught a root fungus that wiped out the whole monoculture."

If such a disaster occurred here, the value of the natural gene pool for reintroduction to areas where disaster strikes would be invaluable. At the present time, that value, and all the other values of the northern spotted owl — old-growth ecosystems are superseded by the value of the trees themselves as sawtimber.

"These timber stands are needed by the industry to maintain the construction business in Oregon," states a BLM (Bureau of Land Management) memorandum discussing the conflict of the northern spotted owl. "BLM timber is the mainstay of many local mills. The old growth stands form much of the BLM's allowable cut for Western Oregon."

The same memorandum also states that the BLM estimates the last of its old-growth timber lands (200 years and older) will be cut within the next 30 years. It also rejects an interim proposal by BLM and forest service biologists calling for the preservation of 300 acres around each known nesting spotted owl site.

It is interesting to note that the letter, dated Oct. 2, 1973, reject-

ing that proposal was co-signed by Robert Torheim, deputy regional forester of the Forest Service, and by Archie Craft, state director of the BLM. The Forest Service is an agency within the Department of Agriculture, and the BLM is an agency of the Department of Interior.

The proposal, developed by their own biologists in conjunction with the Oregon endangered species task force, was rejected because it was only an interim measure and it was felt enough suitable habitat was available until permanent guidelines were set. In addition, it states that "the management by individual animal location, when applied to all species which may be identified as requiring old-growth stand habitat, presents a land management spectre of considerable magnitude."

To date, no permanent guidelines concerning the northern spotted owl have been set. Even though it was placed in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's 1973 "Redbook" and classified as a threatened species nationally, it is still considered "status undetermined" by the office of endangered species. Thus, the Endangered Species Act of December 28, 1973, which superseded the Redbook, does not offer any protection to the northern spotted owl or its essential old-growth habitat.

Since 1973, the federal agencies have sent memorandums to their districts concerning cutting activity in known spotted owl nest-

ing areas. The earlier memorandums were rather general, requiring consideration on an individual basis the relative value of each nest site in recommending development activities in those areas. Recent memos have been more restrictive in favor of the owl.

However, an individual owl has little dollar value. An acre of old growth timber at today's prices is worth about \$10,000. If a timber sale of 80 acres is postponed because of a spotted owl, it has to be substituted with 80 acres elsewhere or else \$800,000 is lost to the local economy.

According to Bill Cowan, acting forestry chief of the Portland branch office of the BLM, about 17,000 acres a year are cut on BLM lands. Although not all of this falls into their category of mature timber (180 years and older), much of it does.

A little figuring shows that if it is determined that 200 nests sites are to be preserved at 80 acres minimum at \$10,000 an acre, then at least \$160 million will have to be withdrawn from our economy over the next few years for the owls alone, not to mention the cost of preserving larger ecosystems.

In addition to the acreage of old-growth, an equal amount of younger stands will have to be preserved in order to have old-growth stands 100 years from today, 200 years from today, and 300 years from today. That will triple the cost of whatever is determined the number of acres

necessary to save the owls or the ecosystem.

It may seem like a good deal of money to save an owl or the old-growth ecosystems, but no amount of money will ever be available to recreate the owls or the natural forests if we destroy them now.

In the near future, Oregon will be required to make that very difficult decision. Will the political pressures of the economy override the desire to have an extinction-free and biotically diverse environment? We have the ability to overwhelm the ecosystems, so we will have to decide.

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