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Lawmakers question removal of spotted owl critical habitat

Eight Democrats ask for investigation into decision

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Eight Western lawmakers are calling for a federal review of the Trump administration's decision to reduce critical habitat protections for the northern spotted owl in Oregon, Washington and Northern California.

In a Feb. 2 letter to Mark Lee Greenblatt, the Department of the Interior inspector general, the lawmakers said reducing the owl's critical habitat designation by 3.4 million acres was "as bewildering as it is damaging."

The group also suggested former Interior Secretary David Bernhardt acted unilaterally to overrule officials at the U.S. Fish and Wild-

life Service, which had previously proposed a much smaller reduction.

"In less than two brief years under Secretary Bernhardt's leadership, the department has been mired in one ethical scandal after another," the lawmakers wrote. "Bernhardt and his loyalists have demonstrated a willingness to insert themselves into the scientific process in order to achieve preferred policy outcomes, withhold

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Associated Press File

The critical habitat of the northern spotted owl, a federally protected species, was reduced by nearly 3.5 million acres.

SOIL HEALTH PAYS OFF

Farm reinvigorates its fields, bottom line

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — A walk around McIntyre Family Farms reveals a different kind of operation than it was 12 years ago.

Back then, the farm produced 3,500 acres of alfalfa forage and corn, wheat and beans.

Then in 2009, the McIntyres started down a different path, one following regenerative, nature-mimicking practices and focusing on soil health.

In 2013, they added cattle and free-range laying hens, followed by pigs, turkeys, meat chickens and ducks.

Brad McIntyre, 38, says the previous iteration of his family's farm, which also does business as McIntyre Pastures, focused too much on yield, and the soil suffered because of it.

"We had been going for yield the whole time, and that's what got us in trouble," he said.

Brad McIntyre co-owns the farm with his brother, Ben, 41, and their father, Loren, 63. Ben's wife, Maria, provides marketing and management support.

The farm got smaller as the leases on 2,500 acres were not renewed.

The current 1,000-acre farm grows alfalfa, grass and corn for feed; winter wheat and barley; and seed crops triticale, hairy vetch, turnips and teff. It follows organic practices on the pasture.

And there are some 15 cover crops, including multiple vetches, warm-season grasses and brassicas.

"We plant a diverse blend wherever we can behind the cash crops," McIntyre said.

The cover crops keep roots in the soil while feeding the animals and poultry, which are moved daily. The poultry follows the animals, helping to spread manure as they consume insects and plant material.

"We use animals as one of the tools to convert biomass into available protein sources," McIntyre said.

The diversity also provides a variety of work for the McIntyres.

Brad and his wife, Jill, have six children, and Ben and Maria have four.

"The purpose of the change was to put more life in the soil" through no-till practices, Brad McIntyre said. "As we learned more, we realized we needed the livestock to reach the next level of soil health. We also had a desire to slow down the work," which "gave the children something to do on the farm."

Over time, the soil rebounded. McIntyre said seeing earthworms return is "a good indication you're moving in the right direction."

He said healthy soil often is "crumbly when you pull it up — and really airy, not compacted and tight." He likens the color and texture to those of chocolate cake.

More profitable

During the transition, the farm became more profitable and sustainable without sacrificing yields, Brad McIntyre said.

"We've added a lot of diversity into our business while improving the health of our soil," he said.

"We started diving into everything," McIntyre said of the changes. "But you can make changes without disrupting your whole farm plan."

Experts say better soil health will in the future drive increases in crop yields as much as advances like new seed hybrids and fertilizers. And making sure soil stays healthy bodes well for a farm's continued productivity.

"My yields have never dropped," McIntyre said. "They only have stayed consistent or have gone up."

The farm now uses 50% less fertilizer and 25% less water than it did previously.



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Brad McIntyre employs chickens on his farm to help build soil health.



Maria McIntyre

Winter soil check at McIntyre Pastures. Earthworms and a "chocolate cake" look are indicators of healthy soil.

Simpson's dam breaching plan a 'nonstarter,' ag reps say

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson says his plan to end all salmon litigation and remove four Snake River dams would offer agriculture unprecedented legal protection, but industry stakeholders say it's a nonstarter.

Simpson, R-Idaho, has not proposed legislation, but on Feb. 7 released a \$33.5 billion concept for salmon recovery, which includes removing the Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams on the lower Snake River in 2030 and 2031.

"It's such a different approach,"



Associated Press File

Ice Harbor dam near Burbank, Wash., is one of four dams on the lower Snake River that would be taken out under a proposal by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

said a Simpson representative, speaking on background. "We're not saying, 'Take the dams out and

SIMPSON'S NORTHWEST IN TRANSITION CONCEPT

<https://simpson.house.gov/salmon/>

save salmon.' We're saying, 'Save agriculture, replace everything and then save salmon.'"

If the dams are removed, each interest group would need sufficient resources to replace the benefits they currently receive, the representative said.

Replacement power generation would have to be built and online by 2030, prior to breaching the dams.

The concept includes an automatic 35-year extension of licensing

for all remaining public and private dams generating more than 5 megawatts in the Columbia River Basin. This would "lock in" the dams and eliminate the "slippery slope" argument of, "If you allow them to remove these four dams they will go after the other main-stem Columbia River dams and others," the representative said.

Under the concept, if the dams

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