

Cutting old timber endangers owls

Spotted owls may be more previously thought but continued cutting of old-growth timber can make these birds increasingly rare.

Until Eric Forsman, a graduate student in wildlife at Oregon State University, started census work in 1969, the status of Oregon's only large, dark-eyed owl was unknown. Since that time, however, about 520 pairs have been located. Forsman has based his doctoral

research on the spotted owl in Oregon.

A resident of western Oregon, the spotted owl can be found from the eastern slopes of the Cascades to the Coast Range. However, extensive timber harvest has greatly reduced their habitat in Oregon, especially in the northern and central Coast Range.

A few pairs of spotted owls have been found in second growth forests less than 60 years old, but, Forsman said,

they prefer the old-growth forests for nesting and hunting. The home range of each pair is two to three square miles but often that isn't all old-growth timber.

Unafraid and easy to observe once they are located, spotted owls are dark brown with white spots on the head and chest. They weigh 20-22 ounces and are 17-20 inches tall. The easiest way to tell the male from the female is by his deeper call.

Spotted owls nest either in cavities in trees or in platform-style nests already built by squirrels or hawks, explained Forsman. These nests are 40-186 feet from the ground.

"The spotted owl is basically nocturnal and, therefore, most active at night," said Forsman. "To locate them, I try to get them to call by either playing a taped call or imitating their call vocally. If you start spotted owl calls on a pair's territory, they usually will respond by calling back."

Concentrating on a single study area in the western Cascade Range from 1975 to 1976, Forsman put transmitters on five pairs of spotted owls and radio-tracked them for 13 months. He determined the size of each pair's home range, what types of forests were preferred for foraging and roosting and examined the territorial relationships between neighboring pairs.

He found that flying squirrels, tree voles and deer mice were the most important prey taken by spotted owls in the study area.

Forsman also has included the molt of spotted owls as part of his research. The molt is the process of losing and replacing feathers, which most birds do completely each year. In spotted owls, however, this occurs gradually between April and October.

With the owls, Forsman has found that the molt occurs irregularly. Part of the feathers are molted one year and the rest are molted the following year.

"One important aspect of the molt is how it is timed in relation to the breeding cycle," said Forsman. A great deal of energy is put both into new feather growth and breeding, so with most birds molt and reproduction do not occur at the same time. With spotted owls, however, when the molt is partial and very gradual, it does occur at the same time as reproduction.

"As long as there are old-growth forests, spotted owls will remain," said Forsman. "But this timber is much desired for harvest and the amount remaining is reduced every year. As old-growth forests are harvested, Oregon's dark-eyed spotted owls are likely to become increasingly rare."

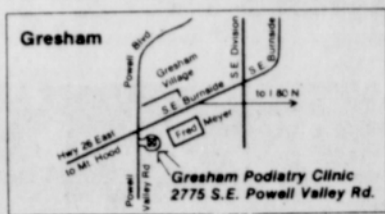
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The Oregon Transportation Commission adopted a rule this week which will allow the issuance of permits for 14-foot high loads on vehicles carrying multiple item commodities. Strict rules, providing for public

safety, will put Oregon in conformity with its neighboring states on the matter of load heights.

The present rule permits heights of 13.5 feet before a special permit is required.



photo by Mark Floyd

Winter waterfall

A FEW days of warm weather followed last week's heavy snowfall creating a large runoff of water in area streams and rivers. The snowmelt also made some of the scenery a little

more spectacular such as this waterfall on the Lolo Pass Road about 10 miles from Zigzag.

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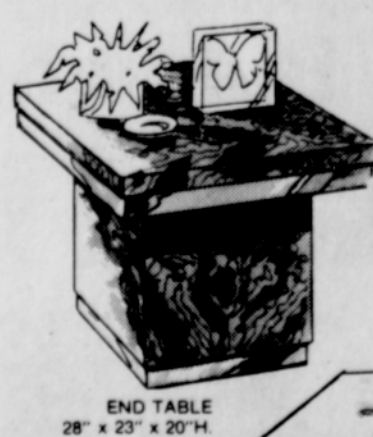
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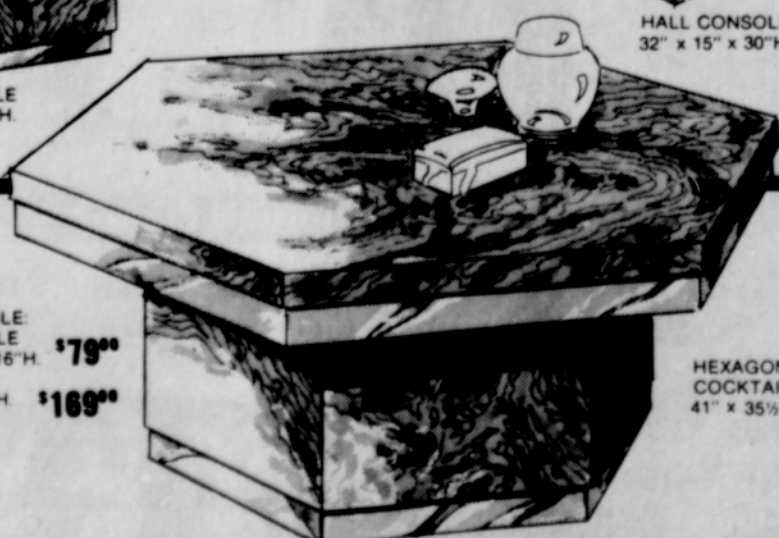
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