



PRESS RELEASE
January 13, 2021

The Association of O&C Counties (AOCC) today expressed strong support for the recently announced decision of the US Fish & Wildlife Service to exclude all O&C lands from the 9.5 million acres previously designated by that agency as "critical habitat" for the Northern Spotted Owl.

"This is a result AOCC has been seeking for a long time and we are pleased the agency finally agreed with us," said Tim Freeman, a Commissioner of Douglas County who is also President of AOCC.

The O&C lands are required by federal law to be managed by the BLM for sustained yield timber production. The 18 Counties with O&C lands in them are entitled to 50 percent of the proceeds from the sale of timber from the lands, with the remaining 50 percent returned to the U.S. Treasury. Counties have relied on their share of harvest receipts to provide essential public services since 1937. AOCC has argued since 2012 that designation as critical habitat interferes with sustained yield management as required by law.

"NSO habitat will be maintained and even increased through sustained yield management on the O&C lands," said Rocky Mc Vay, AOCC's executive Director. *"A new management plan will be prepared in the near future and serve as a fresh model for how to support the needs of the NSO. This is an opportunity to demonstrate how sustained yield management can provide both economic as well as environmental benefits,"* said Mc Vay.

AOCC has long espoused sustained yield management as a means of achieving a full array benefits from these valuable forestlands. Removing the redundant and unnecessary "critical habitat" label will allow focus on how sustained yield strategies can maintain and increase NSO habitat. As three examples: (1) Sustained yield strategies that employ extended cycles between harvest can provide substantial amounts of high-quality habitat over time. (2) Most of the existing high-quality spotted owl habitat on the O&C lands is fragmented. Sustained yield strategies can help overcome this fragmentation by designating older forest emphasis areas that improve habitat quality and concentration over time. (3) Much of the O&C lands are in fire-prone condition with existing high-quality habitat at risk due to high fuel loads. Management to improve fire resiliency while producing timber is a cost-effective method for maintaining and improving high quality habitat over time.

"A new BLM plan offers an opportunity to go beyond inflexible land use designations to recognize how sustained yield management can simultaneously improve habitat levels at the landscape scale and reduce losses from wildfire, all while producing timber and revenue needed by communities and the nation," commented Mc Vay.

For the outline of one of many possible sustained yield management scenarios designed to provide a wide range of environmental benefits while still complying with the O&C Act, see the following: <http://www.oandc.org/proposed-future-management/>.

Eliminating ridged labels like "critical habitat" on the O&C lands is a necessary first step to achieving the promise of sustained yield. O&C timber receipts have been an important component of County budgets since 1937. Historically, payments exceeded \$134 million annually, in current value dollars. (See p. 18, Governor's O&C Lands Report, Tuchmann and Davis, 2013.) In recent years, the Counties share of O&C receipts has been less than \$25 million. The adverse impact on the Counties ability to provide public services has been dramatic. At the same time, the reduced availability of timber to supply mills has caused mill closures and the loss of tens of thousands of irreplaceable jobs.

The exclusion of O&C lands from NSO critical habitat follows a 2019 decision in favor of AOCC in Association of Oregon & California Counties v. Brian Steed et al. USDC, District of Columbia Civil Case No. 16-1602 (RJL). The Court in that case held that the all O&C timberlands must be managed by the BLM according to principles of sustained yield, and that ESA restrictions do not eliminate the BLM's obligations to manage for sustained yield.

"The exclusion of O&C lands from NSO critical habitat was the logical next step for the government to take, to restore the O&C lands to the kind of management federal law requires," said Commissioner Freeman.

"After 80 years of sustained yield management over half of the O&C timberlands remain late successional forest. Sustained yield management of these lands can continue to provide many forest values, including older forest conditions, while simultaneously supporting the social and economic needs of the rural communities in Oregon," said Commissioner Freeman. *"We are happy to see rational and positive decision making by the federal government. It has been a very long process and there is still more to do before community's start seeing the results of better management, but this is a major step in the right direction."*

For additional information, contact Rocky Mc Vay at 541-412-1624 or Rocky@blupac.com