



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Dear Secretary Burgum,

In September 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approved an impractical and grossly expensive plan to kill 470,000 barred owls across the Pacific Northwest to stop the long and steady decline of spotted owls. By extrapolating on costs for prior kills of owls, conducted on a small scale, this plan would require \$1.35 billion over the course of thirty years to hunt and kill one owl species to the benefit of another.

In the spirit of fiscal responsibility and ethical conservation, we urge you to halt all spending on this plan to mass kill a native, range-expanding North American owl species. Up to this point, there has been no Congressional oversight of this project, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement from USFWS was devoid of any meaningful cost estimates. The report also lacks any sufficient detailed description of how such a project would be carried out over an area spanning 24 million acres— from the Bay Area, California to the Canadian border.

Since 1990, USFWS has listed the Spotted Owl as a threatened species in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. In the preceding decades, the federal government has gone to extreme lengths, including limiting logging on millions of acres of federal land in the Pacific Northwest, in an effort to save the embattled and declining species. To this date, there has been no demonstrable increase in spotted owl populations. This latest plan is an example of our federal government attempting to supersede nature and control environmental outcomes at great cost to American taxpayers.

USFWS now argues that the rapid decline of the Spotted Owl is due to competition from its just slightly larger relative, the Barred Owl, which is a range-expanding bird that long occupied two-thirds of the land area of the United States and has now colonized forests in the Pacific Northwest over the last 130 years.

As an August 2024 op-ed from the New York Times notes, “it is unclear that killing barred owls will do anything but merely slow the northern spotted owl’s eventual extinction.” More than 260 stakeholder organizations are now on record in opposition to the plan, including animal welfare groups and 20 Audubon Society chapters. A bipartisan group of state lawmakers from range states have also weighed in and urged the federal government to nix the plan – the largest-ever raptor-killing scheme conceived by any nation.

The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board dismissed the plan, saying: “[l]et nature take its course and leave it to the owls.” Southwest Washington’s local paper, *the Columbian*, stated that it

“seems unlikely that shooting hundreds of thousands of barred owls will slow the evolutionary process that is taking place in the forests of the Northwest.” We hope you will take into account the following points:

The plan’s outcome does not justify the large cost assessed to U.S. taxpayers.

USFWS proposes to authorize trained shooters from government agencies, Native American tribes, private companies, as well as local landowners to enter obscure forest areas to kill nearly half a million barred owls. Contextually, in December 2024, USFWS awarded a \$4.5 million grant to the Hoopa Valley Native American Tribe to kill just 1,500 barred owls. The cost associated is \$3,000 per owl hunted, which is the source of the \$1.35 billion estimate. This is an inappropriate and inefficient use of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

There is little precedent for success.


The U.S. government has conducted wildlife control programs with limited success, mostly on island ecosystems or other areas with natural barriers to entry. There is no precedent for success over a vast and accessible land area like the 24-million-acre patchwork of lands.

Barred owls are a range-expanding, native North American species that have been protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act for more than 100 years.

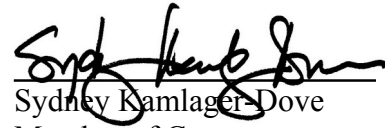
Range expansion is a core biological behavior for nearly all species. To claim that animals are invasive because they expand their range denies dynamism in ecological systems, and use of that term in this circumstance is simplistic.

We urge you to take immediate action to ground this costly and impractical plan.

Sincerely,



Troy E. Nehls
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Josh Harder
Member of Congress



Marjorie Taylor Greene
Member of Congress



Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress



Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress



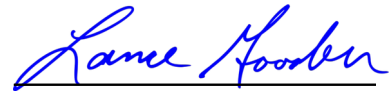
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



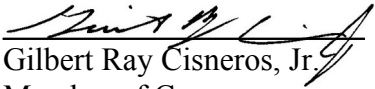
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Member of Congress



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Tony Wied
Member of Congress



Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



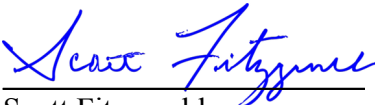
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Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



Anna Paulina Luna
Member of Congress