

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-000

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We wish to associate ourselves with concerns raised by 19 of our colleagues who wrote to you on March 7, 2025, about a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plan to kill more than 450,000 barred owls across 24 million acres in the Pacific Northwest over the next three decades. If carried out as intended, this project would be the largest mass killing of birds of prey conducted by any government in the history of the world. We therefore write to request that in addition to defunding this plan, you also suspend the issuance of take permits to shooters and revoke any such permits that may already have been issued.

Northern spotted owls have been listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since 1990. Barred owls, contrary to the agency's mischaracterization of them as "invasive," are native to North America and have been protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act for more than a century. Due to various ecological factors, barred owls have expanded their range westward over the last 150 years and they now compete with spotted owls for nesting sites. The USFWS proposes to halt the long-term decline in spotted owl populations by killing nearly half a million closely related lookalike owls.

Spanning 30 years and 24 million acres, the size and scope of the proposal dwarfs any wildlife management plan ever attempted by any nation on Earth. Even if executed perfectly, the plan could not hope to achieve its aim of reducing barred owl populations in the area, because millions of barred owls occupy the surrounding forests (including in Canada, where USFWS cannot manage them). The plan fails to explain why barred owls from those surrounding areas would not be attracted to the same nesting sites and simply fly in to replace the culled owls.

As our colleagues correctly pointed out, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) did not bother to estimate the fiscal impact of the project, but nonpartisan groups have estimated the total cost based on a grant awarded by USFWS last year for a similar owl-culling project that cost \$3,000 per owl.

Extrapolating from that figure, the cost of this 30-year project would be \$1.35 billion, consuming roughly half of the agency's annual budget for recovery of endangered species (a responsibility that requires attention to 1,300 species, subspecies and populations). At a time when the Administration is seeking to cut wasteful government programs, this one deserves to be at the top of the list.

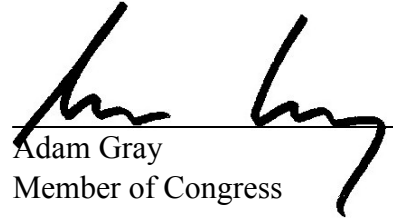
A bipartisan group of Oregon state legislators, as well as the former two-term public lands commissioner for Washington state, have written letters in recent months against the proposed "hoot and shoot," as it is locally known to residents of the Pacific Northwest. A coalition of more than 290 stakeholder groups, including more than 20 Audubon Society chapters, also publicly oppose the plan. These groups recognize that the Endangered Species Act should not be used as a weapon to massacre one native species in unrealistic hopes of protecting a virtually identical species. We wholeheartedly agree.

For all these reasons, we urge you to suspend implementation of the barred owl management plan, including by suspending or revoking all take permits for the shooting of barred owls.

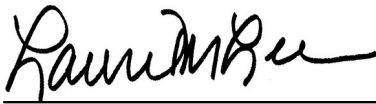
Sincerely,



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Adam Gray
Member of Congress



Laurel M. Lee
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Lance Gooden
Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



Glenn Grothman
Member of Congress




Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress



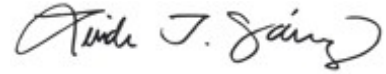
Val Hoyle
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David Scott
Member of Congress



Josh Gottheimer
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