

Dear Representative/Senator,

October 17, 2025

I am a biologist, an independent researcher and writer, and the author of *Beyond the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation: From Lethal to Compassionate Conservation* (2022).

I am writing to express my profound opposition to the plan proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to shoot nearly 500,000 North American barred owls over the next 30 years in the forests of California, Oregon, and Washington purportedly to reduce competition with the Northern and California spotted owls. This reckless plan represents the largest wildlife killings ever proposed and misuses the Endangered Species Act. It cannot be justified scientifically or ethically, as the issue stems from anthropogenic activities which have led to the disruptions of ecosystems and changed migration behavior. The barred owl did not ask to be displaced and forced to migrate to the West Coast. Furthermore, if we label barred owls as “invasive,” why are we not assigning the same label to humans? Where does this plan take human responsibility into account for causing the ‘conflict’ between owl species in the first place? Should spotted owls go extinct, which would be a tragic loss of yet another species, it is not because of the barred owl but because of the human animal.

We Know Large-scale Lethal Programs Fail: Both barred owls and spotted owls are victims of human activities, including habitat destruction, logging, and climate change that have destroyed old-growth forest forests and destabilized ecosystems, forcing species into migration patterns and conflicts that would not have otherwise occurred. The underlying assumption of the USFWS’ plan, that mass killing of barred owls will lead to the survival of spotted owls is being blown out of the water by past large-scale killing programs that have proven to be colossal failures, ecologically, economically and morally. Consider the examples of nutria, coyotes and even the USFWS’ own ‘field experiment,’ in the past where despite the killing of nearly 2,500 barred owls along the West Coast, the spotted owl population *still* decreased, albeit at a slower rate, in the management areas compared to others.

Killing vast numbers of barred owls into perpetuity is not only ethically repugnant but scientifically ineffective with unforeseen, yet real consequences for wildlife. After all, a nightly

human invasion of forests (for the next three decades or even longer) represents a severe threat to many wild animals as 1) the human ‘predator’ is unfamiliar to them and 2) the loud noises of shotguns will likely impact their lives severely. Other consequences of this ill-conceived plan include the following:

- Disruption of animal behavior: It represents a gross disturbance of ecosystems and unforeseen disruptions of animal behavior, e.g., hunting, feeding, nesting, denning, mating and other social behavior.
- Mistaken identities: The goal of killing nocturnal birds of prey will likely cause ‘accidental’ shootings of many other birds and owls, including spotted owls.
- Dispersal of lead from bullets: Lead is a scientifically proven lethal threat to eagles, hawks, owls and many other wild animals.
- The Vacuum Effect: When resident barred owls are shot, the open habitat (or niche) will be rapidly filled with new barred owls, and this scientific fact prevents lethal ‘management’ from being effective in reducing or eliminating barred owls.
- Ongoing Massacre: Given the vast Pacific Northwest spaces with expansive densely forested areas and the vacuum effect, the plan will cause an ongoing massacre of barred owls that is costly and without an end in sight.
- Life Matters to Individual Animals: Every barred owl has an individual life that matters. These birds are sentient, conscious, capable of emotion and social bonding. To reduce them to mere “numbers to be managed” is a symptom of the disastrous human supremacy paradigm.

Moral Failure: To punish one species for adapting to conditions we create is a profound moral failure. “Killing is lazy thinking ...” as Marc Bekoff, Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology calls the senseless killing of other animals. Indeed, to massacre half a million sentient, intelligent, and social birds over decades is not a “management strategy”—it is a matter of great injustice against other beings.

Albert Einstein rightfully noted, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” However, this is exactly what the USFWS’s plan does as it preserves a 19th century worldview that promotes human supremacy, is unable to recognize and respect the intrinsic value of other animals and views all other life forms as inferior, presumes

that some species are more worthy of life than others, and that humans have the moral authority to decide which lives are expendable. The same hierarchical and human domination worldview that created the ‘conflict’ between barred and spotted owls, in the first place. Einstein’s words remind us to acknowledge the limits of our existing methods and highlight the importance of changing our perspective. The true solution lies not within our current and outdated ways of thinking, but beyond them. Thus, I urge you to encourage a new mindset at the USFWS—one where the agency refrains from using ongoing violence against other animals with whom we share the world and instead adopts the strategy of compassionate conservation and co-existence. I am asking that the USFWS invest in common sense, nonlethal methods that are grounded in science *and* in empathy and compassion. These include e.g.,

- **Aggressive habitat protection** and restoration for all forest owl species.
- **Ceasing old-growth logging** and fragmentation in remaining spotted owl habitat.
- **Developing nonlethal management strategies**, including habitat partitioning, deterrent technologies, and forest connectivity corridors.
- **Addressing the root human causes**—climate change, deforestation, clear-cutting old-growth forests and resource extraction—rather than scapegoating wild animals forced to adapt.

In conclusion, you have an opportunity to lead by example—to show that conservation can evolve beyond domination and destruction. The USFWS’s mission to “conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants” cannot be fulfilled by mass killing of sentient wild animals. True conservation is peaceful coexistence, not violent extermination.

On behalf of the many colleagues, friends and families and other citizens who decisively oppose the USFWS rule to kill half a million Barred Owls, I respectfully urge you to disapprove this plan and support the joint resolutions HJR 111 and SJR 69.

Sincerely,

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