

October 15, 2025

Dear Representative,

I write today with deep moral concerns about the current proposal to lethally remove hundreds of thousands (for now) of barred owls (*Strix varia*) in the Pacific Northwest with the hope of possibly saving the endangered Northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*) from extinction (again, for now), and in support of H.J.Res. 111 and S.J.Res. 69.

I am sure that my colleagues in the ecological sciences have raised concerns over the scientific and practical feasibility of the current proposal. I am, however, a senior scholar and professor of environmental ethics and philosophy with more than 250 professional publications and more than three decades of work squarely within the area of wildlife, natural resources, and conservation ethics. I have also led a well-known long-term ecological research program in Oregon at the heart of Northern spotted owl territory and research, collaborated extensively with colleagues in ecology, and work myself in the social sciences. I am well-versed and experienced in moral dilemmas sitting at the intersection of conservation science, policy, society, and ethics. As such, my most central and pressing concerns about the current proposal are philosophical and ethical.

The current proposal is thoroughly grounded in hubris. It perpetuates the notion that humans are smart, powerful, and wise enough to engineer the world in just the right way (typically for the short-term benefit of some humans). I suggest this premise lies at the root of the Western world's current inappropriate relationship with the world. We should not act in ways that are essentially doubling down on our own arrogance, cognitive biases, and false assumptions about ourselves and the world. We should not believe that such arrogance-drenched approaches will ultimately "solve" any of our current environmental problems. In fact, it is easy to imagine how this proposal will simply entrench those ideas and perpetuate our bad relationship with the world. The current proposal is a perfect and tragic example of hubris run amuck – and at exactly the time when we need to be embracing, practicing, and embodying the virtue of humility.

The current proposal is also a distraction from the real problem: namely that we live in the world in such a way that, among other horrifying results, is driving species to extinction. The current proposal once again allows us to look away from the real source of our current environmental challenges, all the while believing we are doing good and righteous conservation work. In this, the current proposal perpetuates a kind of moral immaturity at precisely the heartbreaking moment when the world is asking, demanding, so much more of us.

The current proposal is also philosophically shoddy. It is premised upon inappropriate assumptions about the innate nature of "good" or "bad" species, what is "natural" and what is not, and perpetuating the false dualism between humans and nature.

My Indigenous colleagues often speak of the importance of being in "right relationship" with the world. It is hard to imagine any way in which the current proposal is ultimately a right relationship with the world, or that we are somehow going to kill our way to genuine conservation. I appreciate and share the immediate, yet ultimately misguided, desire to do something about the current, tragic situation and not let a species go extinct. As such, our efforts need to be focused on the sources of our current environmental challenges, avoiding such moral dilemmas in the first place, rather than on attempts to somehow tinker and engineer our way out of the outcomes of our bad relationship with the world.

Respectfully,



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*Please note that the opinion expressed herein is my own and does not necessarily reflect that of my employer