

Spotted owl rears its ugly head again

by H. Graham Lowry

Less than a year after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pulled an environmentalist hoax to cripple the timber industry, a new wave of pagan assaults has been launched to ensure its virtual elimination. The infamous federal decree that the spotted owl is a "threatened species" has been thoroughly disproven, but the Bush administration is using the evidence to turn millions more acres of productive timberland into desolate wilderness.

Last spring's spotted owl ruling put an end to logging in more than 4 million acres of old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, under the fraudulent claim that they constituted the unique habitat for the bird. Timber companies in California promptly sent out teams of biologists to document that the spotted owl thrives in second-growth forests as well, and was therefore not threatened. The Fish and Wildlife Service has now taken the companies' findings of hundreds of owl nesting sites in their own second-growth forests, and is demanding that nearly 1.5 million of those acres be designated "critical habitat" as well!

In all, the agency is proposing that more than *11.6 million acres* of forest in California, Oregon, and Washington be designated as critical owl habitat, including nearly 3.3 million acres scattered throughout northern California. The accompanying restrictions would make logging virtually impossible, since they outlaw any activities that would even "modify" the owl's habitat.

Thriving birds, dying industries

The only thing threatened with extinction in the Pacific coastal forests is its population, along with the timber industry. The majority of the lumber is produced by independent, often family-run companies, which depend almost entirely on cutting public forests. Even before the spotted owl ruling, the entire logging industry was cutting only 1% or less per year of the timber in public forests; but since then, harvest plans have been routinely rejected by federal and state authorities. The results have been devastating: no timber for the sawmills, no lumber for construction, and no jobs for tens of thousands.

In the northernmost counties of California, the heart of the state's timber industry, the casualty list is already a long one. Blue Lake Forest Products is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy; scores of smaller companies are idle for lack of timber. Even among the industry's major corporations, those depending on public

timber have already made significant cutbacks. Louisiana-Pacific's plant at Anderson has been shut down for two months; at Potter Valley, workers are on indefinite layoff; at Samoa, the plant is down to one shift. Georgia-Pacific is down to one shift at Fort Bragg; it normally runs three.

In Humboldt County, roughly 25% of the 12,000 jobs tied to the timber industry have disappeared since last June's spotted owl ruling. International Woodworkers union officials in Arcata estimate the new restrictions, including pending state and federal legislation on timber practices, will eliminate two-thirds of all the jobs in the county. "We've got a \$15 billion budget deficit in California," says Bill Chancellor, business manager of Local 398, "and they want to shut down the timber industry. That could cost the county alone \$10 million a month in revenues, and that's in a county that only has about 100,000 people."

Legislative knives are out

On top of the spotted owl onslaught, officials in Sacramento and in Washington are preparing a legislative bloodbath against the timber industry, with bills that variously would reduce even approved harvests by over 80%, restrict harvesting in forest "watersheds" by 50-75%, reduce clear-cutting in second-growth forests (the only way that new forests can be planted), ban all old-growth cutting for five years, and eliminate industry and labor representation on the California Board of Forestry. A bill in Congress would limit the annual old-growth harvest in federal forests of the Pacific North Coast to 2.2 billion board feet per year, against an average harvest over the last five years of nearly 4.1 billion.

To maximize the devastation in the name of the spotted owl and innumerable other innocent creatures, Congress has also just created a new advisory panel, "for the protection and management of old-growth forests and endangered wildlife species in the Pacific Northwest, including the northern spotted owl." Leaders of the House Agriculture Committee and the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee announced its establishment May 24, after homosexual congressman Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) wrote to Agricultural Committee chairman Kika de la Garza (D-Tex.), demanding that he "oppose any effort to undercut the requirements of the Endangered Species Act as that law applies to the northern spotted owl."

The advisory group includes some of the top pagans responsible for the earlier regulatory assaults on the timber industry, led by Jack Ward Thomas of the Department of Agriculture. He chaired the Interagency Scientific Committee which recommended last year, that logging be banned wherever necessary to protect the spotted owl. Also on the panel is John Gordon, dean of Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, who last year directed a National Research Council study calling for an "environmental" approach to forestry, on the premise that "humans are not superior to the natural world."