

OPINIONS

River Right: Owl control?

BY TOM CARSTENS

The adrenaline rush that kayakers experience in fast-moving white water is what keeps most of us coming back to Oregon's rivers. But, let's face it, much of our sport involves gliding along the flat water between the rapids. I love that part, too, because that's when I can get up close and personal with river wildlife. Bears, otters, deer, foxes, turtles, ducks, eagles, herons, ospreys, fish. I've never seen an owl from the river but, in camp, I sometimes awaken to their low French-horn toots.

One of our owl species isn't doing so well. That would be the infamous northern spotted owl, the bane of loggers and the icon of environmentalists. Like conservatives in Salem, this critter is getting hard to find. The Oregon spotted owl population has dropped 40 percent over the past 40 years. The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, by restricting logging on old-growth public lands, was supposed to help this finicky critter by preserving the only habitat in which it

can live. But things haven't turned out so well. Almost 25 million acres were set aside and thousands of timber-related jobs just disappeared. But it didn't stop the spotted owl's decline. In our neck of the woods, the population is still dropping by almost four percent per year. Why?

The latest theory is that the spotted owl's cousin, the barred owl, is moving in. According to wildlife biologists, we're seeing a family feud and the spotted owl isn't faring well. The spotted owl is pretty picky when it comes to eating arrangements. Its menu is limited—flying squirrels, deer mice, wood rats, and voles—and it dines only at night.

The barred owl, on the other hand, will eat almost anything—morning, noon, and night, including spotted owls! Bigger and more aggressive, it kicks the spotted owl out of its nest. And this bird likes large families—it pops out four times the number of chicks than the spotted owl can produce.

Scientists don't know for sure why barred owls moved west. The move could have been triggered when settlers in the prairies began planting trees, creating what they call a "habitat bridge." Or it could be just a natural pattern. (You can take a look at this migration pattern in the accompanying map. It's sizable.)

Since the spotted owl is listed as "threatened" by the Endangered Species Act, we've come to a point where federal biologists *must* do something to save it. They don't have a choice. Load the rifles. Wildlife Control (don't you love that name?) has begun shooting barred owls. This isn't new: these guys have shot cormorants, terns, and sea lions to protect salmon, arctic foxes to protect



Photos (left) Northern spotted owl (US Fish and Wildlife). (right) Barred owl (Oregonlive.com).

Alaska shorebirds, and coyotes to save the pygmy rabbit.

To be fair, the barred owl hunt is only an experiment. US Fish and Wildlife (USFW) says that they're targeting less than one percent of spotted owl habitat, with the goal of removing 3,600 barred owls within four years. If spotted owls can be shown to recover, then USFW will make new plans. My guess is that they'll try to expand the program, but only to specific areas of old-growth forests. But unless they call out the National Guard, they're going to be limited in firepower and funds...and maybe public support. (Read a complete report of this experiment by Googling "Owl Removal Final EIS.")

Should we continue to try and wipe out the neighborhood bully? Is that our job? Or is this something better left to nature? If I remember right, species domination is part and parcel of the evolutionary process. Is it ethical for us to pick and choose our favorite species? Where does all this "wildlife control" finally take us?

This picture became even more complicated when USFW discovered that these two species can interbreed. USFW says they're *not* going to shoot the hybrids. Hmm...this could get confusing!

In a lot of ways, we seem to be trying to freeze-stop the natural world just where it is. No changes allowed (especially if humans are suspected of involvement). Can we really reverse natural processes? Should we try? Or should we figure out ways to adapt? Picking one species over another doesn't seem right. When it comes to "survival of the fittest," I'll put my money on the barred owl, no matter what we do. When this experiment is over, USFW will ask for public comments. Let's tell them to write a report and move on.

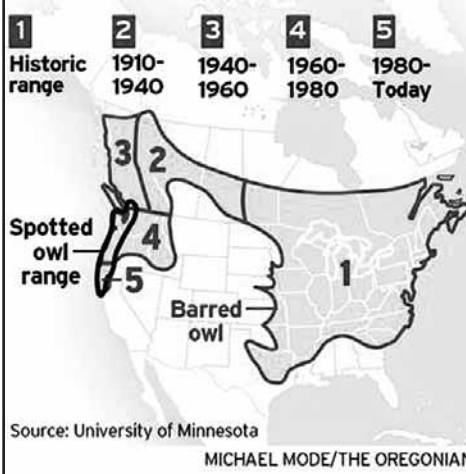
In the meantime, I'll continue to enjoy the hoot owl melody from river camp. I can't tell the difference between the two anyway.

See you on the river.

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Barred, spotted owl range

Barred owls were overwhelmingly eastern until moving in along the Pacific Northwest coast.



Help support our vision for public lands

BY MARION HADDEN

In August 2013, a group of Applegate citizens got together at the Applegate Grange and came up with a vision to influence policies on our public lands. In light of our current drought situation, it is essential to protect our forests so our water sources remain healthy for local streams, farms, wineries and individuals. It is important to circulate this vision once more to remind everyone in the Applegate Valley of the urgency of protecting our public lands and water and, hopefully, to encourage

more people to endorse the vision.

Following is an abbreviated version of the Applegate Community Public Lands Vision that you can find online at <http://kswild.org/applegate-vision>.

Applegate Community Public Lands Vision

As residents of the Applegate Valley, we value the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands that surround our homes because they are an integral part of our community. The forests and rivers managed by the BLM are essential to clean drinking water, native salmon runs, and the expanding recreation economy of the Applegate Valley. We urge the management of the BLM lands in the Applegate Valley to support our community values by:

- Preserving the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) as a designated area in which the BLM must use a collaborative, community-based decision-making process.
- Decoupling logging receipts and county revenue and, at the same time, exploring alternative sources of revenue. It is unrealistic to expect that timber revenues from O&C (Oregon and California Lands Act) lands alone can make up budget shortfalls.

- Managing forests to increase diversity, which would include the preservation of mature trees over one hundred years old, protection of riparian forests, and conservation of sensitive plants and animals, including salmon and steelhead.
- Preserving the clean water supply that is essential for family farms, small businesses, individual wells, and community water supplies.
- Protecting lands with wilderness characteristics and roadless areas such as the Wellington Wildlands and the Dakubetede areas.
- Reducing fire risk and firefighting costs

through fire-prevention planning.

- Using only existing roads for thinning and fuels-reduction projects as prescribed by the forest management or fire management plans.
- Ensuring that all forest management recognizes the need for reduced timber harvest levels in the fragile, dry forest ecosystems of southwestern Oregon.

Over 200 people have signed on to this vision. If you'd like to add your support, go to <http://kswild.org/applegate-vision>.

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Hikers enjoy the Enchanted Forest Trail on BLM-managed land.



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Email opinion pieces and letters to the editor to gater@applegater.org, or mail to *Applegater* c/o Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc. P.O. Box 14, Jacksonville, OR 97530.