

Northern Spotted Owl Emergency Measures 12Aug2025

Northern Spotted Owl

Generated October 22, 2025 04:16 AM UTC, IPaC v6.128.16-rc6



Northern Spotted Owl and Northern Spotted Owl Critical Habitat Conservation Measures for Emergency Responses

August 8, 2025

The following conservation measures were developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Washington Ecological Services (WA ES) Office to help federal action agencies minimize and avoid adverse effects to listed species and designated critical habitat when responding to emergency situations in accordance with 50 CFR § 402.05. If you have any questions regarding these conservation measures or need additional technical assistance, please contact us at: washingtonfwo@fws.gov

The safety of first responders and the public are the highest priorities during emergency responses. Only those conservation measures that do not create a safety hazard should be employed. Federal action agencies should document how the recommended conservation measures were implemented and the results of the implementation in minimizing effects to listed species and their habitats; as well as the amount or extent of any incidental take that occurred because of the response activities. Section 7 consultation for emergency response actions should be initiated once the emergency response has been completed and human life and property are no longer at risk.

If your federal agency proposes to implement an action that is not part of an emergency response, as defined in 50 CFR § 402.05, and your proposed non-emergency action may affect a listed species or designated critical habitat, please contact WA ES (washingtonfwo@fws.gov) for technical assistance.

Recommended Conservation Measures for Emergency Responses

General Conservation Measures

1. Maintain landscapes that provide for successful northern spotted owl dispersal. At the watershed, township, or project area scale, 50% of forest stands that support spotted owl reproduction should be characterized by a minimum 40% canopy cover and quadratic mean diameter > 11 inches and be well-distributed to support connectivity.
2. Design activities within occupied or historical northern spotted owl home ranges to maintain or manage for stand conditions that support survival and reproduction. At least 40% of the provincial home range and 50% of the core home range should be composed of functional nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat.
 - a. The core home range size is approximately 510 acres.
 - b. The provincial home range size on the Olympic Peninsula is approximately 14,650 acres.
 - c. The provincial home range size in the Washington Cascades is approximately 6,530 acres.
3. Avoid building new, permanent system roads or landings within 330 feet of nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.

4. Avoid removing nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat within historical or occupied 100-acre activity centers.
5. During the spotted owl early nesting season (March 1 to July 15),
 - a. Timber felling, yarding operations, road work, and restoration work involving chainsaws and heavy equipment should not be permitted within 65 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
 - b. Helicopter operations should be avoided within disturbance distance of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat, based on helicopter type, to reduce disturbance.
 - i. Chinook 47d: 265 yards
 - ii. Boeing Vertol 107, Sikorsky S-64 (SkyCrane): 150 yards
 - iii. K-MAX, Bell 206 L4, Hughes 500: 110 yards
 - c. Rock crushing in quarries and pile driving should be avoided within 120 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
 - d. Blasting in quarries should be avoided within 0.25 miles of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
 - e. Tree climbing should be avoided within 25 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
 - f. Small fixed-wing aircraft operations should not occur within 110 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
 - g. The use of drones should be avoided within 65 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat.
6. During the late spotted owl nesting season (July 16 to September 30),
 - a. Helicopter operations should be avoided within disturbance distance of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat, based on helicopter type, to reduce disturbance.
 - i. Chinook 47d: 100 yards
 - ii. Boeing Vertol 107, Sikorsky S-64 (SkyCrane): 50 yards
 - iii. K-MAX, Bell 206 L4, Hughes 500: 50 yards
 - b. Rock crushing in quarries and pile driving should not be allowed within 5 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat to reduce the risk of injury from loud noise.
 - c. Blasting within 100 yards of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat should be avoided to reduce the risk of injury from loud noise.
7. During the full spotted owl nesting season (March 1 to September 30),
 - a. Prescribed burning should be avoided within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of occupied or unsurveyed nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat to avoid exposing northern spotted owls to harmful levels of smoke toxicity. If burning within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of these habitats is proposed, burning should be conducted under conditions that allow for maximum smoke dispersion and burn units should be kept small to avoid prolonged exposure to individuals.
 - b. Use the smallest, quietest helicopters that can accomplish the task efficiently and minimize overflights over nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat during the nesting season and use the same flight paths when practicable.

8. If a suitable nest tree must be felled during the nesting season, such trees should be assessed by a qualified biologist to ensure they are unoccupied.
9. No active or historical nest trees for northern spotted owls should be removed during any time of year. If a known nest tree is identified as a hazard, contact the USFWS for technical assistance.
10. When practical, leave felled hazard trees in place to contribute to coarse woody debris on the ground.
11. To the extent practicable, retain existing down wood and coarse woody debris within treated stands.
12. No regeneration harvest should occur within 100 feet of nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat to minimize edge effects.