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File Code: 2670

Date: November 15, 2006

Route To:

Subject: Guidance on Limited Operating Periods for the California Spotted Owl

To: Sierra Nevada and Southern California Forest Supervisors

Demographic studies for the California Spotted Owl have been ongoing for over 15 years. These studies have served to better define the breeding, nesting, and fledging period for the California Spotted Owl. In the past, these periods have been broadly protected by an LOP that extended from March 1st until August 31st. Analysis of the demographic data has allowed a shortening of the LOP by 2 weeks.

The LOP pertains to occupied nest sites only or any unsurveyed suitable habitat. It restricts forest operations within 0.25 miles of an occupied nest tree or within 0.25 miles of unsurveyed suitable habitat. If current surveys demonstrate that known nest sites are not occupied, or do not have young, then the LOP does not apply. Please utilize the LOP dates in Table 1 for your future projects.

Table 1. Limited Operating Periods for the California Spotted Owl within 0.25 mi. of known nest trees, or if unsurveyed, within 0.25 mi. of Suitable Habitat.

Locality	LOP period
Sierra Nevada Forests	3/1 – 8/15
Southern California Forests	2/1 – 8/15

Should you have any questions on implementation of this guidance, please contact Patti Krueger, Regional Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator, at (707)562-8954 or pkrueger@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Beth G. Pendleton (for)
BERNARD WEINGARDT
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Limited Operating Period for the California Spotted Owl October 2006

Demographic studies of the California Spotted Owl have been underway for over 15 years. This data set represents a significant body of work that has enabled the identification of many basic facets of California Spotted Owl behavior and population dynamics that were only generally known. Based upon this body of information, it is now appropriate to update the original operational activity limitations to continue providing consistent, reliable, mitigation for all life stages of the California Spotted Owl while also providing for a balanced use of the National Forest resources.

The primary purpose of the limited operating period (LOP) is to prevent or minimize disturbance to California Spotted Owls during the breeding, nesting, and fledgling time periods. The LOP restricts when forest operations occur so that undisturbed breeding and offspring development can proceed.

Table 1 has separated out the locality based on geographic areas (Sierra Nevada's and Southern California). If the proposed project is not within a Protected Activity Center (PAC) (Sierra Nevada Framework Plan Amendment), Activity Center (AC) (Southern California Strategy), is more than 0.25 miles from a known nest tree, or is more than 0.25 miles from unsurveyed suitable habitat (stands containing conifer and hardwoods that are of medium to large trees with a greater than 40% canopy cover), the LOP is moot and should not be included as a mitigation or project requirement. If protocol level surveys are completed and no California Spotted Owls are breeding or nesting, and no fledglings are present, the project can proceed without the LOP during the remainder of the year of survey.

Table 1. Limited Operating Periods for the California Spotted Owl within 0.25 miles of Suitable Habitat, or if surveyed, within 0.25 mile of known nest tree

Locality	Habitat Manipulation Projects
Sierra Nevada Forests	3/1 – 8/15
Southern California Forests	2/1 – 8/15

Information used to Evaluate LOPs

The demography studies that this update is based upon were conducted in the following locations that span the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range in California: Lassen National Forest, Eldorado National Forest, Sierra National Forest, and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park. The Lassen NF demographic study is led by Jennifer Blakesley and Barry Noon (Colorado State University); the Sierra NF and Sequoia-King's Canyon NP demographic studies by Tom Munton (PSW) and John Keane; and the Eldorado NF demographic study which is lead by Rocky Gutierrez and Mark Seamans (University of Minnesota). For the Southern California National Forests, the existing limited operating periods remain in place as provided by the LOP guidance, document

dated June 1994. The interdisciplinary reviewing team consisted of Dave Gibbons, Patricia Krueger, Kary Schlick, Gary Thompson, and Quentin Youngblood. Advisors to the team consisted of Cheryl Carrothers, Robin Eliason, John Keane, Chris Knopp, Steve Loe, John Robinson, and Don Yasuda. Forest Biologists within the Pacific Southwest Region provided feedback and guidance.

New Information

The results of the demography studies have resulted in new dates for fledging and protection for the fledglings once out of the nest. California Spotted Owls fledge from the nest when they are still downy and incapable of flight. For approximately the next 30 days, they are relatively immobile and vulnerable as they complete feather development and gain the ability to fly. Because of their relative immobility and vulnerability after fledging, habitat manipulation restrictions extend to one-month post fledging to provide reasonable protection.

Overall, California Spotted Owls were found to fledge at least two weeks earlier than previously thought. Fledge dates reflect 85% of the birds having left the nest, which encompasses typical behavior and conditions. Determinations used the most reliable fledging information only, (sites checked within 21 days prior to fledging). The following dates were documented: for the Lassen National Forest, June 4 to July 13; Eldorado National Forest, June 10 to July 1; Sierra National Forest, June 4 to July 8; and the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, June 3 to July 12. The earlier dates of the Eldorado and Sierra National Forests are based on a disproportionate number of lower elevation nest sites within those study areas, thus their fledge dates are earlier than more typical Sierra sites.

These dates were combined to use the most conservative date (July 15) and 30 days were added for fledgling protection. Consequently, the date of August 15 for habitat modification throughout the range of the Sierra Nevada's is believed conservative and scientifically defensible.