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Northern Spotted Owl Achieves Candidacy Status Under California Endangered Species Act

ARCATA, Ca. -- The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) has moved to make the iconic Northern Spotted Owl a candidate for listing under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). On August 7, 2013, the Commission voted 3-2 to advance the owl to candidacy status in response to a petition filed by the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) requesting the listing of Northern Spotted Owl as “threatened” or “endangered” under CESA, finding that the petitioned action “may be warranted.” This is an important procedural step in the listing process for endangered species under California law.

The Northern Spotted Owl is under siege on many fronts. Northern Spotted Owls are threatened with extinction by past and ongoing habitat loss, primarily to timber harvest, which can exacerbate competition from the aggressive and invasive Barred Owl. The increasingly rare and old growth forest adapted owls are now understood to be at risk from the use of rodenticides and other poisons used in large scale trespass marijuana operations, and there is increasing concern about what the impacts of climate change will be on the forest ecosystems that the owls call home.

“This is an important first step for the recovery of spotted owls,” said Rob DiPerna EPIC’s Industrial Forestry Reform Advocate. “The fact that the Commission moved to promote Northern Spotted Owls to candidacy status clearly shows that we have made a fair argument that the species is under extreme threat, and that protections under CESA are necessary to abate the risk of extinction.”

The Northern Spotted Owl is considered an “indicator” species, in that the presence or absence of the owl is a direct indicator of the health of the forest ecosystems in which the species resides. Due to the continuing decline of the owl through out its range, and a worrisome population trends forecast within its range in California, EPIC petitioned for CESA listing of the owl in August 2012. Though the California Department of Fish and Wildlife had recommended the status review, the Commission postponed action earlier this summer, choosing to wait to grant the owl candidacy status at their August meeting.

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The CESA candidacy period will remain in effect until the Commission makes a final determination as to whether or not listing of the spotted owl under CESA is warranted. At the direction of the Commission, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will now conduct a full status review of the owl to aid the Commission in making its final determination. The Department has one year to complete this review. EPIC will continue to monitor and engage in this process to ensure that Northern Spotted Owls are given protected status and listed under California state law. In parallel to this initiative to increase protections for the owl under California state law, EPIC has also petitioned to see the Northern Spotted Owl “uplisted” from “threatened” to “endangered” under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) has for more than 35 years been working to protect human and natural communities on the North Coast of California from the negative impacts of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. EPIC uses public education, citizen advocacy, and strategic litigation to implement comprehensive conservation strategies intended to promote ecosystem management and sustainable economies in Northwest California. See www.wildcalifornia.org for more information.