

A NEW CENTURY OF FOREST PLANNING

Spotted Owls & the Spotty Sciences that Spawned Them: 5 Questions

Posted by bobzybach on 19 June 2013, 3:48 pm



Dr. Ben Stout in spotted owl habitat, near Mt. Jefferson Wilderness on west shore of Round Lake, May 15, 2004 (Photo by B. Zybach)

By Dr. Bob Zybach, PhD
Program Manager, www.ORWW.org
June 19, 2013

[Note: This is the text version of an illustrated article written for the current July 3rd issue of Oregon Fish & Wildlife Journal.]

Spotted owls have now been in the news for more than 40 years; were listed as an endangered species via the Endangered Species Act in 1990; have been actively managed since 1992 by classification of millions of acres of federal forestlands in Washington, Oregon, and California as “critical habitat” — and have still declined in population at an estimated rate of 2-3% a year ever since.

No one will argue that these results are based on political decisions that have had unexpected and wide-ranging cultural, biological, economical and aesthetic repercussions; particularly in the Pacific Northwest. Some have even referred to these circumstances as a “major social experiment.” According to federal legislation and much of the popular press, spotted owl legislative decisions have been based on the “Best Available Science,” the “newest” scientific information, and “scientific consensus.”

But were they really? And even if true, was all of this “newest science” used to make wise or thoughtful legislative decisions? Efforts to stabilize or increase spotted owls numbers have cost American taxpayers tens of billions of dollars, been partly responsible for unprecedented numbers of catastrophic wildfires, caused the loss of tens of thousands tax-producing jobs for western US families, created economic hardships for hundreds of rural counties, towns, and industries, and indirectly resulted in the deaths of millions of native plants and animals.

Was that part of the plan? Should we continue down the same path to “recovery” that has resulted from these decisions? My personal concern is not the politics involved in making such decisions – that’s what politics are for. My concern is that the scientific process is being misused and degraded via such politics, thereby reducing public faith in the credibility and capability of science in general and scientists in particular. Also, I think the public should be directly involved in such decision-making processes and not continue to leave it up to university and agency committees and the courts. Lawyers on both sides of the table get paid in these disputes, and so do politicians and government scientists; it is just the loggers, truck drivers, sawmill workers, foresters, engineers, tree planters, and construction workers — and their families and communities — that are left with the consequences.

The American public has been told that the scientific information used to drive spotted owl political decisions has been “peer reviewed,” often with the declaration that it is the latest and best information available for making such decisions (and thus leaving “science” and scientists as scapegoats when things don’t work out; i.e., “politics”). The quality of peer reviewed science, however, depends on the chosen method of review, the qualifications of reviewers, and the review criteria – which are typically expressed as a series of questions.

The US agencies in charge of managing public resources have not been forthcoming about the scientific information and quality of peer reviews used to drive their policies and decisions. There is no logical reason the American public has been excluded from this process, nor is there any logical reason to continue such exclusion. The following five questions are intended to begin a more transparent and scientifically credible review of the “science-based” management decisions involving spotted owls. These criteria are just as valid for public discussion as they are for scientific review, and I believe should become part of the public debate on these animals.

1. Are Spotted Owls Even a Species?

This is a trickier question than you might suspect. When I was a kid in public schools I was taught that animals that could biologically breed and produce viable offspring were considered the same species. A few anomalies such as lions, tigers, horses, and burros usually stretched the limits of these discussions; otherwise, viable offspring was the rule. The generation of Americans who taught this basic approach to biological taxonomy were members of the same generation that passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, as spotted owls were first being introduced to the general public. What was the principal intent of this legislation? More importantly, how were they defining “species?”

The most common owl in North America is called the “hoot owl,” or “barred owl.” It looks and sounds almost exactly like a spotted owl, occupies the same range, and has successfully bred and produced viable young with spotted owls. Are spotted owls therefore, just the western-most cousins of the brown-eyed hoot owl family? Or did some committee of nameless scientists give them separate Latin names that somehow transformed them into separate species?

And if they really are the same species, shouldn't this whole “critical habitat” operation be shut down ASAP and the people who assembled it be held accountable?

The analogy I have been using for several years is probably not politically correct, but makes this key point in terms most audiences can relate to: ‘there are far greater variations in physiology, vocalizations, coloration, preferred habitats, diet, and appearance between a Pygmy and a Swede than between a barred owl and a spotted owl.’ Sometimes some people seem uncomfortable by this comparison, so potatoes, red and yellow roses or German shepherds and French poodles can be substituted as discussion points if the audience is more familiar with those species.

The point is, humans have mastered selective breeding and domestication of many species of plants and

animals – and now we are trying to do the same thing with a particular group of wild owls. The public, at least, should know what it is spending such enormous sums of money on – and if it's only to breed a particular variety of common hoot owl, shouldn't that information be known and perhaps reconsidered?

2. What is so "Critical" About "Habitat"?

In 1992 the federal government designated several million acres of Pacific Northwest forests as "critical habitat" for spotted owls, thereby fundamentally changing the management methods and focus of our public forests. These lands were no longer managed by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management foresters, but rather put into the hands of US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologists – who declared them off-limits to logging and most other commercial activities. These same lands had been used for subsistence and recreation by generations of American families, and for hundreds of generations of local Indian families before them. Now it was being made into a massive and unprecedented reserve for a single species: spotted owls.

These so-called "critical" properties were designated by dozens of 2.7 mile diameter "crop circles," supposedly based on the "home range" of a nesting spotted owl. The final result was much like the cookies or biscuits shaped for your mom with drinking glasses or teacups when you were first learning to bake. The circles mostly correlated to owl sightings and were concentrated in public lands the USFWS did not want logged. Thus, about seven million acres of some of the world's finest timberlands were abruptly removed from management for human uses for the first time in history. These designations were transformative and unprecedented, yet quickly adopted without independent scientific review or substantive public discussion.

Environmental activists and some scientists have long claimed that spotted owl habitat used to exist in far greater amounts before 1940 than it does now – therefore, spotted owl numbers must have been greater in the unknown past than they are now. This is a baseless assumption that cannot be documented and therefore needs serious critical examination before acceptance – much less widespread adoption at an enormous cost to taxpayers or treatment as a "fact."

In 1996 I wrote a research report for a Portland, Oregon law firm dealing with this issue. My study area was the Columbia River Gorge, including thousands of acres of private and federal forestlands along both Oregon and Washington sides. My findings showed – and documented – that spotted owl "habitat" (by current definitions at that time) was likely never more than 5% or 10% of the total study area during anytime since the 1790s. Subsequent research over two million other forested acres in western Oregon

have yielded similar documented findings.

There is no demonstrated correlation between owl populations and artificial designations of “critical habitat” zoning. These areas appear far more critical for the survival of agency biologists and ecologists than for owls of any stripe or spot. Predator-prey relationships seem to have much more to do with owl populations than forest structure – an assertion borne out by efforts used to restore endangered condor populations, which are kept and bred in cages, and by the fact that at least one agency wildlife biologist caught and kept a spotted owl as a family pet for 30 years.

3. Are Barred Owls a Living Example of “Natural Selection?”

“Darwin’s Finches” are 15 species of closely related birds – but with entirely different beaks and feeding habits, adapted to their local environments. These birds, and their individual variations, were first noted by Charles Darwin in his exploration of the Galapagos Islands in 1835, and were instrumental in the development of his theories of biological evolution and “natural selection.”

Darwin’s finches aren’t really finches at all, but passerines: members of an order of songbirds and perching birds containing more than 110 families and more than 5,000 species – including Darwin’s 15 finches. Passerines are the second most numerous vertebrate families on the planet, following bony fishes, and the basis for most subsequent findings and theories regarding evolution.

In the mid-1900s, Darwin’s thoughts on natural selection were being refined into “ecological niche” theory, a systematic look at “how ecological objects fit together to form enduring wholes” (Patten and Auble 1981). It is basically an effort to systematize Darwin’s theories so they can be diagrammed and programmed into mathematical computer models.

Spotted owls were first described in California in 1857, in Arizona in 1872, in Washington in 1892, and in Oregon in 1914. Barred owl were first described in 1799 in the eastern US, expanded their range westward to Montana in the 1920s, and were interbreeding with spotted owls in Western Oregon and Washington by 1975. From all historical perspectives, it appears as if two isolated populations of hoot owls – western and eastern – have coincidentally expanded their ranges during the past century or so, and have now joined together to form viable hybrids that are replacing former spotted owl populations. How is this any different than Europeans and Africans colonizing North America and replacing Native American populations as they “expanded their range?”

In 2007 the US Fish & Wildlife Service began a long-term program of systematically killing barred owls in order to maintain the genetic purity of local spotted owl populations. You can use dogs or roses – or humans – as analogies here to see how artificial breeding precedence is being used. Is this a god-like attempt to control evolution, simply another human effort to artificially produce desired breeding characteristics, or some kind of ecological niche theory testing opportunity?

Depending on the rationale used to justify these actions, the next questions become: “Is this method logical or practical?” And, “How much does it cost?”

4. How Reliable Are Computerized Predictive Models?

Modeling isn't rocket science – it isn't even a science. Computer sciences made rapid gains in quality during the 1970s and 1980s, with one result often being modeling predictions accepted as reasonable substitutions for actual field observations and independent analysis — especially by other modelers.

Wildlife models are almost exactly the same thing as “Sims” computer games, but with a lot more acronyms and algorithms in their attempts to mimic actual life. And then predict the future. Making predictions and comparing them with actual outcomes is a hallmark of scientific methodology, but when predictions are based on unstated assumptions, unproven theories, and “informed” speculation – all typical modeling characteristics — then the product can be little different than any other computer game. Models are a very useful tool for summarizing current knowledge and suggesting possible futures, but they have proven no more capable of predicting future conditions and catastrophes than ancient oracles or modern religious leaders and politicians. Or most scientists.

In his book “Best Available Science (BAS): Fundamental Metrics for Evaluation of Scientific Claims” (Moghissi et al. 2010), Dr. Alan Moghissi categorizes computerized predictive models into five basic types. Those typically used to model wildlife populations and habitat correlations he terms “primary” and “secondary” models. Despite their inherent weaknesses, he observes that society “has no other choice” but to use primary models in making certain decisions. Regarding secondary models, however, he states, “a society that bases its decisions on these models must accept the notion that it may waste its resources.”

Often, the only people said to be “qualified” to assess models and modeling methods are “other modelers.” The results have not been good. It is time to shine some daylight on this industry and have actual environmental scientists and concerned members of the public take a better look at “the man

behind the curtain.”

5. What Do Government Scientists Say About Owl Recovery Plans?

Certainly, if the US government was going to spend billions of our dollars, ruin the economies of hundreds of our communities, and kill millions of wild plants and animals in the process, they would have at least used “peer reviewed” science – and been transparent in their methods – wouldn’t they?

In 2007 a number of prominent university and agency scientists that had help create the spotted owl “recovery plans” were asked, in essence, by USFWS to review their own work. Not surprisingly, they decided it was pretty good stuff and – despite declining spotted owl numbers – we should be doing more of it.

The “Scientific Review of the Draft Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan and Reviewer Comments” was written by Steven Courtney, Jerry Franklin, Andy Carey, Miles Hemstrom, and Paul Hessburg, several of who also appear prominently in their review bibliography – often for work done for, or used by, the USFWS. Despite the obvious potential for bias with this arrangement, the work was conducted openly and transparently and resulted in several useful observations and recommendations, including:

*Current models of owls and their habitats are largely heuristic. Hence decisions on important issues such as reserve size, spacing, etc., must be made with relatively weak predictive tools.

*The approach of the Draft Recovery Plan for designating habitat goals is deeply flawed. However the need to set locally appropriate and sustainable habitat goals remains a valid goal.

*The threat from wildfire is underestimated in the Draft Recovery Plan . . . This threat is likely to increase given both current forest conditions, and future climatic change.

Conclusions

1) Federal spotted owl regulations have been implemented during the past 25 years at an enormous cost to American taxpayers – particularly those living in rural timber-dependent areas of the western US.

2) Current plans are a proven failure. Targeted owl populations continue to decline despite an unprecedented public investment into their maintenance.

3) Barred owls and spotted owls may be the same species, in which there is no logical need to continue managing for the survival of either one. Or, they may be different species and we are simply witnessing natural selection in progress.

4) The scientific basis for these plans should be considered in full light of public and scientific review before they are continued much longer; the methods by which agency modelers and university theorists apparently dictate federal policies should also be publicly reconsidered.

5) Scientific research and review teams dealing with spotted owl and critical habitat issues should also include scientists with an understanding of current and historical roles of people in the environment, such as landscape historians and cultural anthropologists.

Share this:

Like this:

Be the first to like this.

Filed under [Uncategorized](#) | [33 Comments](#) | [Permalink](#)

33 Comments



TreeC123

June 19, 2013 at 7:38 pm

Spotted owl denial is a lot like climate change denial. An uphill climb on soft sand that never ends.

All these questions have either been answered or they are irrelevant and designed to obfuscate the fact that our forests were grossly mismanaged for decades leading to the imperilment of wildlife that we share the planet with.

**Larry Harrell Fotoware**

June 19, 2013 at 9:23 pm

Sadly, it is the “protected habitat” that is being lost in the last 20 years, due to wildfires. Most nesting habitats are protected from logging but, not protected from wildfires, including Let-Burn fiascos. Every nest that is lost to wildfire is another nail in the spotted owl coffin.

**TreeC123**

June 20, 2013 at 10:06 pm

Larry, Once again you are stating what you “believe” to be true instead of seeking and reporting the facts. You are breaking every rule of ethical argument by refusing to base your discussions on objective facts.

Since the NWFP was adopted approximately four times more owl habitat has been lost to chainsaws compared to fire.

141,300 Acres of northern spotted owl habitat “losses” caused by stand replacing fire on both federal and non-federal lands from 1994 to 2004. Raphael, M.G. (2006). Conservation of listed species: the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet. Chapter 7 in R.W. Haynes, B.T. Bormann, D.C. Lee, and J.R. Martin (technical editors), Northwest Forest Plan—the first 10 Years (1994–2003): synthesis of monitoring and research results. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon. <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/publications/gtr651/> p 121.

155,999 Acres of suitable northern spotted owl habitat was “removed” by “management” (i.e. logging) on federal lands from 1994 to 2003 (includes partial harvest). U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. 2004. Estimated Trends in Suitable Habitat for The Northern Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) on Federal Lands from 1994 to 2003. For Use By: Sustainable Ecosystems Institute for the Northern Spotted Owl 5-year Review. USDI Fish and Wildlife Serv.

583,500 Acres of northern spotted owl habitat “losses” due to “regeneration harvest” on non-federal forest lands from 1994 to 2004. Raphael, M.G. (2006). Conservation of listed species: the

northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet. Chapter 7 in R.W. Haynes, B.T. Bormann, D.C. Lee, and J.R. Martin (technical editors), Northwest Forest Plan—the first 10 Years (1994–2003): synthesis of monitoring and research results. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Oregon. <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/publications/gtr651/> p 121.

Furthermore, through natural processes of forest growth, new owl habitat is being recruited faster than it is being lost to fire. Moeur, M, T. A. Spies, M. Hemstrom, J. Alegria, J. Browning, J. Cissel, W. B. Cohen, T. E. Demeo, S. Healy and R. Warbington. Northwest Forest Plan—The First Ten Years (1994-2000): Status and Trends of Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forests. USDA Forest Service General Technical Report. PNW-GTR-646. http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/publications/pnw_gtr646/



Larry Harrell Fotoware

June 21, 2013 at 5:40 am

Once again, Tree includes “foraging habitat” in his totals, which includes “matrix lands” under the NWFP. Additionally, he includes private lands, which may, or may not be actual nesting habitats. Remember, “foraging habitat” can include a multitude of differing and variable landscapes. Yes, owls DO use even clearcut lands to forage in. Lumping foraging and nesting together is disingenuous and not useful for comparison in owl issues. Scientists SHOULD know this but, they are apparently searching for “something else”.

Once again, it is ALL about nesting habitats, and actual nests. This is about Federal lands, as we have little control over what private landowners do with their own lands. The NWFP has nothing to do with private lands, although some want to “acquire” the remaining suitable nesting habitats through other methods, including more preservationism.

Certainly, there are unknown amounts of nests outside of known “owl circles” that have been lost to wildfires. Yes, I have SEEN actual protected nest stands with 100% mortality, and I have posted the pictures here.

Of course, studies that use only nesting habitat would be extremely difficult to design and carry out. Instead, those studies fail to differentiate between nesting and foraging habitats. If we apply that same standard, we can say that 500,000 acres of “owl habitat” was burned in the Biscuit Fire, alone. *smirk*

Remember, the NWFP was supposed to be a compromise in allowing logging on “matrix lands” (which are probably also considered to be “suitable habitat”).



Zane G. Smith, Jr.

June 20, 2013 at 9:37 am

Bob Zybach’s analysis and subsequent questions form an excellent basis for broader public involvement in this issue. The brief analysis sets the stage and the 5 questions should stimulate candid “back and forth” sharing of ideas and thoughts. Out of that should grow a far better understanding of the issue than the simple endorsement of no management vs. unlimited management of our forest resources.

The Forest Service operates under a variety of statutes that when taken out of the context of its Mission and Organic Act promotes disputes unresolvable short of political and judicial decisions. Abandoning the basic mission of the Forest Service adversely affects not only loggers, truck drivers, etc. but whole communities, the Nation and eventually the very survival of our National Forests. Already proposals are under consideration to place public forests under the umbrella of politically appointed committees. I think it is time to reinvolve the Forest Service in the management of the National Forests for “The greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.”

This can be done in light of the changing priorities for these resources without abandoning the the Mission that still is appropriate.



TreeC123

June 20, 2013 at 9:54 pm

Zane: It sounds like you are under the misimpression that the national forests are not being managed. This is simply a myth. Our forests are (thankfully) not being logged like they were back when you were in charge, but they are being managed for water, wildlife, recreation, quality of life, AND timber. The “basic mission of the FS” is being met today, far better than it was back when ancient forests were being rapidly liquidated.

Private lands continued on the trajectory of clearcutting that National Forests were on and now the evidence has accumulated to show that federal lands are produce every kind of public benefits better

than non-federal lands – cleaner water, more carbon, better habitat, less fragmentation, more biodiversity, better and more diverse recreation, etc. etc.



Bob Zybach

June 20, 2013 at 10:17 pm

Tree: I'm not sure why you are anonymous, yet so willing to lecture and inform those of us with actual names, careers, and personal accountability on the line. Maybe that's why. I suggest you Google Zane Grey Smith, Jr., before offering him any more National Forest management advice. And use your real name if you want to be taken seriously with these types of pronouncements — or at least be willing to be held accountable for them. Better an anonymous lurker than a presumptuous troll is my unsolicited advice to you.



Gil DeHuff

July 29, 2013 at 8:44 pm

TreeC123

1) Re your statement above: "Private lands continued on the trajectory of clearcutting that National Forests were on and now the evidence has accumulated to show that federal lands are produce every kind of public benefits better than non-federal lands – cleaner water, more carbon, better habitat, less fragmentation, more biodiversity, better and more diverse recreation, etc. etc."

— A) Can you give us a link to a reputable document that has verifiable facts supporting this quote?

— B) What would you say if I told you that I believe that industrial forests (managed according to state BMP's and subject to independent audits) have a significantly lower percentage of acres of wildfire and subsequent habitat loss, soil damage, insects and disease, and decreased water quality per total acre owned than federal lands? Would you have any facts to repudiate me? Do you have any recent experience on the ground in both federal and industrial lands to base even a subjective opinion on the subject?

2) Since you won't tell us who you are or your qualifications to speak on these subjects as I have specifically asked you elsewhere on NCFP, I am going to see if I can guess what is most important to you:

— A) With the moniker of TreeC123 are you telling us that you don't believe in harvesting Trees with a Circumference greater than or equal to 123 inches (~ 39" DBH)?

— B) What is so special about trees greater that 123" in circumference when your comments generally seem to suggest that cutting any trees is not good and especially not if done by clearcut.

3) The following quote from you "Our forests are ... being managed for ... timber" seems to run counter to my impression in "2-B". So I am confused and would like to know your philosophy as to when timber should be harvested and what types of harvests are acceptable. Like wise, I'd like to know when you think harvesting is unacceptable and what types of harvesting are unacceptable and what science rules out harvesting under those conditions.



farmrdavefarmrdave

June 20, 2013 at 2:59 pm

Dr. Bob Zybach; Thank you sir, you have a way with words I do not. You have enunciated the thoughts that have been in my mind for a decade. There is another matter not mentioned. It is the O&C act of 1937. In this contract between the federal government and the various counties. The O&C lands within those counties are to be managed by federal agencies to ensure adherence to current, sound environmental practice. The lands are to be sustainably harvested with a portion of the proceeds going to those same counties "into perpetuity". This means that it is not what to do with these lands. It means that if the reasoning behind the spotted owl endangered status is flawed science, or that the Spotted Owl is in a process of natural evolution through interbreeding with Barred Owls there is nothing to justify the federal government refusing to honor the O&C Act. of 1937.



Bob Zybach

June 20, 2013 at 10:26 pm

Thank you for the kind words, farmrdave! My entire attempt is to bring these science-based questions to public attention, so that taxpayers can have a clearer idea as to how and why their resources are being used.

I'm in full agreement with you on the 1937 O&C Act, and what the federal government's legal and ethical obligations should be in regards to those lands.

**Larry Harrell Fotoware**

June 21, 2013 at 8:15 am

From Tree's link:

"This simple analysis only tells part of the story because it does not take into account other disturbances from insects and disease and the cascading effects of increased high-severity fire. Losses of old trees to insects and disease would continue to occur and further reduce the amount of older forest and trees in these landscapes (Spies and others 2006). Increased occurrence of high-severity fires could lead to stands and landscapes with a more uniform structure (either shrubby fields or areas of dense regeneration) than could have occurred under the low- to mixed-severity fire regime. This uniformity would create a positive feedback loop that further increases high-severity fire and insect and disease outbreaks. Although some uniform patches of early-successional forest would have occurred and contributed to biological diversity, large areas of such stands would be less desirable for the goals of the Plan, which emphasize retaining structurally complex stands including large live trees."

Catastrophic wildfires are definitely NOT good for spotted owls or northern goshawks!

**mike**

June 25, 2013 at 9:33 pm

I have a serious question for the professionals here (not treebarker). I spent most of a decade working on 200,000 acres of private timberland in Humboldt County. Every activity was dependant on their biologists locating owls, at times we had to pull out of a harvest unit when an owl "moved". The company had to operate this way due to agreements with the fed and state over a land purchase. They had close to 200 owls on this acreage with about 80 nesting pairs.

I'm no biologist but have read various books and articles about the beginnings of the owl protection regime. Having also harvested timber on private, state, and USFS lands all over the northwest I am well aware of the vastness of these collective timberlands. So when I read the original estimates of Franklin early on of 1500 birds from Canada to N Cal (correct me if I'm wrong) I was skeptical to say the least. Now they say they are losing 2% a year....right.

Has anyone studied why these Humboldt owls can thrive on intensively managed private forests, meaning virtually 0 old growth yet nest in 50 year old second or third growth and seem to thrive? Are these super owls or is the whole premise that destroyed hundreds of small communities a smoke screen by folks that Franklin and tree boy that it's simply wrong to use a perfectly renewable resource? My guess is the latter and my unscientific BS detector can't help but go off.

Thanks in advance.



Bob Zybach

June 25, 2013 at 10:41 pm

Hi mike: I'm hopeful that Larry and a few other Commenters familiar with northern California birds and habitat conditions will respond to your questions.

Through geography and employment, I have been involved with the spotted owl since it first became an issue. For those with an interest in the early political and scientific history of the owl in western Oregon, I highly recommend Ben Stout's 2006 booklet, assembled from the files of a local politician, Liz VanLeeuwen: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Northern-Spotted-Owl-Oregon/dp/155395890X>

I recall a beginning number of around 1500, too, but I think Franklin may have been getting his numbers from Chuck Meslow, who got them from his grad student, Eric Forsman, who mostly looked in old-growth for birds — which is where he ended up finding them, and where their numbers seemed lowest. It was quite a while ago, and it's been a long time since I have thought of those times, but I'm guessing the answers might be in Ben's book. He was a great guy, great teacher, and great researcher. He was truly a forester. He also had an overpowering golf jones that I will never understand, but he is good with language and has a way of presenting complex ideas in understandable terms.



Larry Harrell Fotoware

June 26, 2013 at 8:20 am

I think we are finding out that owls are more flexible about nesting habitat than was previously thought. Before widespread logging, I'd bet that most of the prime nesting habitats were always occupied. Offspring had to find their own habitat, often in less-than-optimal areas. There are some facts

that must be considered when discussing owls. Owls must have a system of nests to continue to reproduce. If you have ever seen an active nest, you'd see how messy a full nest can be. It takes many years for that nest to become usable again. They also are territorial, driving off both competitors and offspring from occupying their domain.

Mating pairs are driven by instinct to reproduce, so they will try and build new nests in younger vacant forests. Old growth forests offer both suitable nest trees (with forks and broken tops) and adequate cover from predators. Younger forests offer less of those opportunities but, owls do seem to be making it work for them. However, it is not that likely they will be able to establish a reliable system of nests in young forests.

In working with Columbia Helicopters as a Sale Administrator, I was able to see a map of the Headwaters area of redwood forests (their side job), with all the MANY protected owl sites shown. I'm not sure how much protection each actual nest stand gets, on private lands. The Forest Service protects actual nests with a chunk of land around them. The habitat, including nest tree systems, are usually protected within a 5000 acre "Protected Activity Center" (here in California Spotted Owl country) which is established using the "best habitat".

Also at issue is the fact that northern goshawks utilize the exact same habitat, and even the same exact nests. They have very similar nesting habits. Both birds are on the Endangered Species List, due to the lack of nesting habitats. Continued loss of nesting habitats to bark beetles and wildfires represents the biggest threats to these birds, and the Endangered Species Act doesn't protect habitats from those threats very well, through their management plans. Some people will discount the danger of wildfires to nesting habitats but, it is very clear that the birds will not nest in burned forests. Yes, they do use them for foraging.



wolf moderate

July 29, 2013 at 5:15 pm

Thanks for writing this piece.



Bob Zybach

July 29, 2013 at 7:04 pm

Thanks for reading it! (I'm assuming you're in agreement with most of it).



wolf moderate

July 30, 2013 at 6:01 pm

Of course. Born and raised in Oregon. Keep up the good work.



mike

July 30, 2013 at 8:36 am

Heck, Larry, we have met back then. I was a project manager for CHI. I still have an old "owl map" and it shows the many more sites than owls. So your explanation about them moving makes a lot more sense to me now.

If I recall the owl circles PL used (I'm sure in conjunction with USFWS and CDF) were a mile in diameter and management was constrained by proximity to the nest. IIRC selective harvesting was allowed in the outer half of the circle. During nesting no activity was allowed. This is where we would have stop logging when owls "moved" and we were too close. Taking a crew and undoing dozens of chokers and packing them out was a pain.

If I was young and an owl biologist Palco lands would be an intriguing case. Given Franklin and company's 1500 original estimate, how can so many NSO's do so well on 200,000 acres of highly managed timberland.



Gil DeHuff

July 29, 2013 at 7:51 pm

To all but TreeC123

Thanks to Bob especially and to the rest of you for your great "on the scene" insights. This supports all that I have read and heard about this issue since it began. I remember roughly two decades ago when Simpson Timber pointed out that nesting was working well in younger, actively managed stands.

I was shocked to find out that facts like those and the ones made in this discussion thread made no impression on preservationists. That is when I began to realize that these environmental concerns were just proxies used as a technique to try to lock up as much land as possible for some reason that I still do not really understand. When I get cynical, I tend to think that are only really interested in power and getting the rest of us to pay for their desire for pristine viewsheds and to pay for expanding the recreational opportunities of a very few.

**Bob Zybach**

July 29, 2013 at 8:48 pm

Thanks Gil: This article/editorial has been getting a lot of mileage since I first posted it here. Today, for example, I did a 30-minute interview with Lars Larson for the radio; yesterday he posted it on his FaceBook page and over 100 people commented on it, and about a dozen reposted it to their own pages. The previous week it was printed in a 10,000-circulation regional hunting and fishing magazine. Plus lots of mostly favorable responses from other scientists, resource managers, and politicians, via emails, other blogs, and e-newsletters. Not sure if it's the timing of the article, or the maturation of digital communications, but it has been something of an interesting surprise.

No need to be cynical — just look at the facts. For many years it has been pretty obvious that the reason we're buying Canadian lumber from Weyerhaeuser is that the primary beneficiaries of removing USFS timber from the market have been the industrial forestland owners. And "both sides" lawyers and a few politicians. From my perspective, it has been the environmental activists (and the media) who have been played like a drum, serving the "useful idiots" role in this charade.

Is it conspiracy or incompetence? The problem is, on the surface they both look exactly the same (we've discussed the history of this perspective earlier in this blog). Or maybe some of both. The important realization is that it is probably limited to these two options. Nothing else seems to make sense. In my mind.

Note: I've heard that one of the larger landowners in northern Cal is using their own hunter to kill barred owls so that spotted owls remain a presence and so they can continue logging without interference from USFWS. How's that for politics? A gyppo logger now needs a minimum of faller, a choker setter, an equipment operator, and an owl hunter. That wouldn't have even made a good parody 20 years ago. It still doesn't make sense.

As always throughout history, this struggle is about control of land and resources, and the owl — as you say — is just a proxy. The Enviros have been willing puppets throughout, and sold a lot of newspapers and made a lot of lawyers happy in the process: but look at whose hands are on the strings. It's not the nitwits; they're not the real problem — it's those of us even bothering to listen to them in the first place is where the trouble starts. In my opinion.



Sharon

July 30, 2013 at 9:42 am

Bob- there are other possibilities other than conspiracy or incompetence.. one is that the politicians, when faced with a thorny problem, thought they could defer to “scientists” and avoid taking a tough stand.

Scientists honestly wanted to help out – plus, had sizeable egos and liked the limelight, and maybe had not as much knowledge of the real world of the species and what it does in each habitat. It would be easy to say some wildlife folks had been kept down by timber folks and liked having power, but I think the dynamics were more complex than that. Then of course ESA being all about “science.”

Scientists then applied the best knowledge they had at the time, which became concretized and unable to change with new info, due to lawyers and portraying any changes as “bad for the environment and products of the evil other party”, tasting and liking power and bucks, and the everpresent egos. Just my two cents.

This doesn't require incompetence or conspiracy, just a number of actors acting in their own self-interest and the folks trying to stand up for people not being effective. But I guess maybe that goes back to incompetence-except it might have gotten caught up in partisan politics.

The question is “can we start over and have an honest conversation about how best to go forward?” OSU could play a key role in separating the “science” wheat from the chaff, IMHO..



Bob Zybach

July 30, 2013 at 3:03 pm

OSU would be great, but has been resistant for years. My recent invite to give a 90-minute talk and discussion this fall to grad students and faculty about this very post will be my first presentation there in 10+ years, so maybe the tides are turning a bit. The College of Forestry, Rangeland Sciences, and/or the PNW Research Station would be perfect organizations to lead such a consideration and discussion. LOTS of resistance from the hierarchy who have made a living putting this stuff together the past few decades, though.

Yes, I was exaggerating a bit to make a point, but your example would definitely fit into the “incompetence” category. Turning our forests over to a small handful of non-forester ego-driven ivory tower theorists certainly doesn’t sound like a very competent approach. And a pretty sloppy conspiracy — although common efforts to stop logging, get on TV, and attract a gaggle of admirers of both sexes might be part of the motivation. I remember having lunch with one of the Gang of Four members when this was all shaping up, and he bragged that they were on the verge of becoming famous and “pretty soon we are going to have “Gang of Four coffee cups when we come in here.” It was said as a joke — with a strongly implied “grain of truth” message of it. They were offering me employment at grad student rates (“minimum wage”), but the first hurdle was to become a fawning sycophant in order to be paid. I don’t think I’m exaggerating on that point, though, and subsequent events would seem to have borne this out. I was surprised to get the invite, and surprised they would even think of offering me such terms.



Sharon

July 29, 2013 at 9:15 pm

Gil, to me it’s one thing to want to lock up land or not; those are ultimately political questions to be solved by political forces according to our form of government.

What particularly gets my (mountain) goat (and I think Bob Z.’s) is to claim that “the science tells us we have to.”

Then there’s also the question of whose observations are included in “the science” and whose are not; if people observing the beasties in the field don’t come to the same conclusions as those modeling, how do the controversies get resolved? and how open and transparent is that process?

**Gil DeHuff**

July 29, 2013 at 10:34 pm

Sharon

Agree. There is proven science and then there is pretentious science. We just need to be sure that we have our facts straight and present them to all of the public as well as the movers and shakers so that the politicians will be inclined to act in accord with the best science as borne out by on the ground testing. I sure hope that you and Steve Wilent can use your roles to move the SAF more in the direction of item #2 in the SAF Core Language

**Sharon**

July 30, 2013 at 7:51 am

For those we aren't familiar with the SAF Core Language, here it is:

The SAF Core Language is as follows:

1 "Thriving forests. Essential resources. A strong community"

2 "We challenge land owners, decision makers and society at large to make choices about our forests based on professional knowledge, leading-edge thinking and a century of practical experience"

3 "We seek viable pathways forward, balancing diverse demands on our natural resources"

4 "We set the standard in forest management, bringing science, best practice and the best people together to actively shape the future of our profession"

5 "For the greatest good. For the greatest number. For the long run."

6 "Society of American Foresters Evolving Forest Management since 1900"

**Guy Knudsen**

July 30, 2013 at 1:52 pm

Bob, interesting comments. Is this really true: “Efforts to stabilize or increase spotted owls numbers have cost American taxpayers tens of billions of dollars”?? Wow, that’s a lot of money, where did you get the number from? \$10 billion is a little more than the total of the Forest Service’s FY2011 expenditures, so tens of billions is expensive for sure. Is there a reference for that? Your first scientific question, “are spotted owls even a species” needs a little work to be useful. What you learned as a kid in school wasn’t really correct. The obvious contradiction to your definition of a species is mating between a horse and a donkey, which can produce viable (living) offspring (but still we don’t consider horses and donkeys to be the same species). But it goes beyond that, hybridization between animal species is a long-recognized phenomenon, here’s some reading for a start (available online): K. Schwenk et al. 2008. Introduction. Extent, processes and evolutionary impact of interspecific hybridization in animals. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 363:2805-2811. But even posing the question this way is somewhat irrelevant: everyone familiar with the ESA realizes that it treats “species” as a term of art, which is not strictly the same as used in zoology or botany. Here’s the relevant text, from ESA §3(15): “The term “species” includes any subspecies of fish or wildlife or plants, and any distinct population segment of any species or vertebrate fish or wildlife which interbreeds when mature.” One can approve of the law, or complain about it, or work to have congress change it, but your first question is unlikely to get any traction in either a scientific or legal context. No offense intended, just applying a little “peer review” to your commentary 😊 best, -Guy

**Bob Zybach**

July 30, 2013 at 2:50 pm

Guy: Thanks much for the detailed answer — very much appreciated! I’ll try and answer point-by-point:

1) My original draft had a huge typo: “hundreds of billions” — thanks to Larry on this blog for catching it before it went to press. USFS budgets are the least of it. The creation of catastrophic wildfire conditions and predictable results is part of it; damage to local families and businesses in timber-processing communities (another reader pointed out they were NOT “timber dependent” — that was the correct adjective for all of the rest of the communities they served) is a big share of it; air and water pollution and related health effects; loss of recreational income; loss of cultural and historical artifacts; and so on. Not sure what anyone has done lately on this, but the spotted owl was being called the “billion dollar bird” on at least one journal cover 20+ years ago. The methodology I used to make this

very general estimate is the same as I used to help assess the “true” costs of wildfires a few years ago:
<http://www.wildfire-economics.org/>

2) Please note in my “species” question that I don’t offer an answer, and I even question this assertion in the conclusions. My point is to get this into the public for consideration, not have to point them to a couple of specific university or agency scientists studying that point (and probably using a whole LOT of jargon to describe their findings). Also, I make a clear reference to such hybrids (horses and mules usually come first, then ligers) in that same section. Jacks and jennies are definitely part of the discussion, but how about dogs or potatoes? The main point is: what was the INTENT of Congress when they passed ESA in 1973 (and yes, there is a lot of speculative jargon in that bill, too). And are such interbreedings common, or unusual — such as with horses and big cats?

3) Note the phrase: “which interbreeds when mature.” What I learned at school really WAS “correct” for that time — and the key point to reconsidering the language in the original ESA rulings. I’m not sure if the “distinct population segment” was put in by lawyers or a handful of scientists, but it certainly has been a lucrative (and costly) phrase through the years. So are freckled redheads a “variety” or a “subspecies?”

Not even slightly offended! Very much appreciative and thankful for such a careful reading and considered responses!



Sharon

July 30, 2013 at 2:29 pm

Yes, in ESA, species becomes a legal term. However there is a history of the concept, in fact entire books have been written about the concept. As the blog token evolutionary biologist, I liked this wikipedia entry on the concept.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Species_problem

Note the quote from Darwin

.. I was much struck how entirely vague and arbitrary is the distinction between species and varieties
 ”

— Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (p. 48)[

Bad communication and clarity idea.. taking a “vague and arbitrary” scientific concept and using it as a term of art in the legal system. Just sayin’



Guy Knudsen

July 30, 2013 at 4:13 pm

yes indeed, one of my jobs is as a microbiologist, and considering fungi and bacteria, those little critters pass around genes like they were a bowl of chips. And taxonomy... I’m still holding out for the return of ‘Fomes annosus’ 😊 -Guy



Mike Vaughn

December 15, 2013 at 2:06 am

Not to be disrespectful, but I find many flaws with your argument. I have no “credentials,” so I will likely be discredited – so be it.

First, science is not perfect, as you stated throughout your article. However, we gain knowledge through these processes so that we may disprove or acknowledge hypotheses, develop theories, and determine fact from non-fact. Unfortunately, the empirical sciences and its practitioners cannot completely remove themselves from the sociopolitical arguments taking place since ultimately, for better or worse, this gain in knowledge directly relates to our human condition and our survival on this planet.

I agree, we use science as a political tool to get what we want (cultural values). Many times this is for the public good; many times not. However, your brand of “science” is arguably the polar opposite of “best available science,” in that, your biased views favor extraction with regard to human wants, rather than ecological processes and the health of the environment. Thus, independent peer reviews are no different from governmental or academic reviews. They each have their own biases.

You can fool all the people some of the time...

Was the elevation of the spotted owl to the endangered species list a political move? Absolutely! Without

the listing of the spotted owl, our forested landscape would look much different today. And for what? Diminished acreage of late successional forests; less specie and genetic diversity and problems with ecological processes; and the status qua of cutting beyond “sustainable yields” within our federal forest would have continued. This is short-termed and shortsighted. (The theory of “sustainable yield” is old school, as there is no such thing, but that is a different argument.)

The most flawed of your argument, tinged with racial bias, is your following statement:

“Spotted owls were first described in California in 1857, in Arizona in 1872, in Washington in 1892, and in Oregon in 1914. Barred owl were first described in 1799 in the eastern US, expanded their range westward to Montana in the 1920s, and were interbreeding with spotted owls in Western Oregon and Washington by 1975. From all historical perspectives, it appears as if two isolated populations of hoot owls – western and eastern – have coincidentally expanded their ranges during the past century or so, and have now joined together to form viable hybrids that are replacing former spotted owl populations. How is this any different than Europeans and Africans colonizing North America and replacing Native American populations as they “expanded their range?””

My question to you is, upon this coincidental expansion of each owl species across North America, did we artificially cause this occurrence by our own westward march? It is conceivable that Barred owls followed our lead as we cut corridors across the landscape. Is what you view as natural processes really just that?

What I am getting at is it is more plausible that humans are the force that dispersed both species. In this case, the questions becomes do we want to fix it, why, and how? Is the spotted owl irreplaceable to the ecological landscape, or can the Barred owl fill this ecological role? What consequences, if any, can we expect in the future by letting the spotted owl go extinct? What does this mean to humanity and our conscience as it relates to environmental ethics and our cultural morality? How do you place a value/cost on extinction?

Environmental “science” is not black and white, but an evolving mosaic of human consciousness and intrinsic ecological depth.

To counter your analogies, and to add another, because genetic diversity within a species is as just as important as specie diversity. A German shepherd is not a French poodle, although they are both domesticated dogs; and, a Barred owl is not a spotted owl, although they are both forest owls. Each dog and each owl has niche characteristics that differentiate them from one another. This argument can be carried further to pure wild strains vs. hatchery steelhead trout, but I think I made my point.

**bobzybach**

December 15, 2013 at 4:25 pm

Hi Mike: I'm not sure credentials are that important for this type of discussion. I didn't getting any such credentials until I was middle-aged and I can't see as how they made me any more logical or intelligent. Plus, even with credentials I get discounted all of the time. Now I'll address your points:

1) Where are you finding my "biased views" regarding extraction? I was trying to ask important questions, not promote an agenda. And yes, depending on how one defines "best available science", I do hope my perspectives are a "polar opposite." I'm also defining "best available science" as politicized science, just as you have defined it — and we are in total agreement that the adoption of the spotted owl was a political decision. That is something I really was trying to infer in this post.

2) Independent peer reviews — particularly if conducted transparently — have far less chance of being biased, because there is a lot less at stake ("job security" and "government grants") if they contradict an agency's position. When people are paid to review their own findings by an agency that paid them to generate the same information in the first place, the opportunity for "bias" is unavoidable. Independence and transparency would easily take care of that problem. There is a huge difference between peer review and personal assessments.

3) There was no "tinging of racial bias" as you state — the comments were purposefully made because there is a huge difference between races of species and species themselves. My credentials are as an historical ecologist. That is, I study the role of people in the environment from a documentary standpoint. I avoided comparisons between Nazis and their efforts at racial purity with people, and the USFWS and their plan to create racial purity in hoot owls. The similarities are obvious, but that analogy would have been counter-productive. I got the same argument when I presented this paper to a group of forestry grads at OSU a week ago, and I gave the same answer: "yes, my examples are racial — that is the intent."

4) Yes, I view human actions as "part of the natural process" because I view people as being part of nature. More to the point, I believe we are the "keystone species" on almost all terrestrial landscapes on the planet and have been for quite some time.

5) You are asking good questions, which is exactly what I had hoped to achieve with this article. I could spend some time telling you what I think about each of them, but I'm not expert enough to address most

of them, and there is too little information available to answers the ones I am familiar with. Mostly you seem to be concerned about “natural” vs. “artificial”, and that is more of a semantics debate than a scientific concern.

6) My degree is in Environmental Sciences, but I can’t follow your definition and don’t have a clue as to what “intrinsic ecological depth” means. I would agree that this perspective requires quote marks around the word “science”, though.

7) It is your opinion that “genetic diversity is as just as important as specie diversity.” I really don’t have an opinion in that regard. I actually/honestly use your same “German shepherd/French poodle” analogy all the time, although I sometimes drop in a Peruvian hairless or a Mexican chihuahua for added geographical diversity.

8) And yes, there is a difference between hatchery and “wild trout” at some level, but my perspective is that it isn’t much different than a baby born at home rather than a hospital. I don’t believe in the “niche” stuff.

Mike, it seems like we really are in agreement on most of this, although our basic perspectives seem different. I would highly recommend reading Botkin’s book on this blog (I’m way behind in my comments, although comfortably ahead on my readings, and need to catch up). It addresses many of the points you are making. I’d also recommend doing a search on Bob Lackey and “normative science”, either on this blog or on Google. I’d be interested in your comments in those regards, too.



Mike Vaughn

December 19, 2013 at 1:24 am

Hi Bob,

I am strongly opinionated. I grew up in a forest product family, and worked in plywood and lumber mills for eleven years, before heading off to college to be shaped by the academic complex, LOL. I was working for a mill in Willamina just before the owl was listed. We were encouraged to sign a petition against the listing; I declined the offer. After, I got called about every name in the book.

1) Where are you finding my “biased views” regarding extraction? I was trying to ask important questions, not promote an agenda. And yes, depending on how one defines “best available science”, I

do hope my perspectives are a “polar opposite.” I’m also defining “best available science” as politicized science, just as you have defined it — and we are in total agreement that the adoption of the spotted owl was a political decision. That is something I really was trying to infer in this post

Answer: Maybe I misunderstood you here, but your argument showed definite winners and losers: the poor loggers and their families vs. the government fat cats holding on to their jobs and paychecks. I am sorry if I misinterpreted your thinking, however you came across as favoring the timber industry and opposing the government scientists and the owl. It is not the government and scientists who I blame for this “crisis, but the timber companies for their greedy more, more, more stance.

2) Independent peer reviews — particularly if conducted transparently — have far less chance of being biased, because there is a lot less at stake (“job security” and “government grants”) if they contradict an agency’s position. When people are paid to review their own findings by an agency that paid them to generate the same information in the first place, the opportunity for “bias” is unavoidable. Independence and transparency would easily take care of that problem. There is a huge difference between peer review and personal assessments.

Answer: Those that contribute moneys can just as easily sway independent reviewers. For example, way back when the Exxon Valdez spilled its oil, I sat in a classroom a few months after the spill happened, where a “independent” scientist told us that the impact to the area was minimal, and there would be no long-term affects to the ecology of the area. We found out later that this person took money from Exxon to say such things. Do “independent peer reviews... have far less chance of being biased?” – Not when money is involved! They would have to be really, really transparent.

3) There was no “tinging of racial bias” as you state — the comments were purposefully made because there is a huge difference between races of species and species themselves.

Answer: Noted.

4) Yes, I view human actions as “part of the natural process” because I view people as being part of nature. More to the point, I believe we are the “keystone species” on almost all terrestrial landscapes on the planet and have been for quite some time.

Answer: I think it fallacy to believe that industrialized humans are a part of nature, especially when throughout human history we have so desperately, and disruptively, been trying to escape from such

bonds. (It is also fallacy to think we have succeeded in such endeavors.) What I mean by this is industrialized humans believe themselves to have escaped nature by the technologies that have come forth. It is difficult to think otherwise. We have effectively removed ourselves by figuring out how to defy and control nature (though nature still governs us by its “laws”), through guided efforts in science. We have manipulated, twisted, and tortured “nature” to bend to our rules, and increased human longevity through creative pharmaceuticals, medical procedures, and easy living accomplished through better standards of living achieved by this manipulation, exploitation, and banishment of nature. This is at the “natural” environment’s expense! We cannot be a part of nature until we accept that we are a part of nature. Acceptance is a prerequisite and requires us to live within nature’s limitations. Most humans, in industrialized parts of the world, are not part of nature in the strictest, philosophical sense, until we succumb to death and our molecules and atoms transfer back to the earth.

On the other hand, if a person believes that humans are, in the strictest, scientific sense, a part of nature, then anything that we do is a “natural” progression of human ingenuity and cognitive growth. This effectively pardons humans of all accountability and consequences of our actions, as it pertains to nature, since we deemed ourselves a “part of nature,” even though we are outside the realm of nature in every conceivable way, by definition, and/or what is “scientifically” viewed as being “nature.” Christianity holds the same view: this world, given to us by God for us to use for OUR benefit. Again, there is no accountability or consequences for abusing “nature” by means of human intelligence – at least in the eyes of a higher being. This to me is a nonchalant way to view the human/nature relationship and exhibits sort of a que sera, sera attitude.

5) You are asking good questions, which is exactly what I had hoped to achieve with this article. I could spend some time telling you what I think about each of them, but I’m not expert enough to address most of them, and there is too little information available to answers the ones I am familiar with. Mostly you seem to be concerned about “natural” vs. “artificial”, and that is more of a semantics debate than a scientific concern.

Answer: Thank you! However this is extremely taxing on my mind-mass, so this will be my last post. I do not have to think this hard at my work, LOL.

Yes, I believe that humans are an artificial abomination of nature. We are the freaks of nature. Do not get me wrong, I am deeply embedded in being human.

6) My degree is in Environmental Sciences, but I can’t follow your definition and don’t have a clue as to

what “intrinsic ecological depth” means. I would agree that this perspective requires quote marks around the word “science”, though.

Answer: What I was aiming for is, for how much we have gained in scientific knowledge there will always remain the unknown. Some knowledge is intrinsic to nature and only to nature. Understanding most of what nature is about is beyond human, or artificial, intelligence and learning. I think you touched on this with your modeling example.

8) And yes, there is a difference between hatchery and “wild trout” at some level, but my perspective is that it isn’t much different than a baby born at home rather than a hospital. I don’t believe in the “niche” stuff.

Answer: A better analogy than “a baby born at home rather than a hospital” would be, a baby born and raised at home, as opposed to being born and raised in an orphanage. Niche does happen between species and within the same species, i.e. Spring run Chinook salmon vs. Fall run Chinook salmon: The “same” species taking advantage in different ways of water flow and temperature, and seasonal, in-stream resources.

Mike, it seems like we really are in agreement on most of this, although our basic perspectives seem different. I would highly recommend reading Botkin’s book on this blog (I’m way behind in my comments, although comfortably ahead on my readings, and need to catch up). It addresses many of the points you are making. I’d also recommend doing a search on Bob Lackey and “normative science”, either on this blog or on Google. I’d be interested in your comments in those regards, too.

Answer: Thank you for the suggested reading. I will look into them.



bobzybach

December 20, 2013 at 1:02 am

Hi Mike:

Thanks for the thoughtful and detailed response. You’ve probably noticed that I tend to be pretty opinionated myself, so no problem relating on that score. If you are from Willamina, you might even know where Eddyville is, where I raised my kids. Thanks, too, for numbering your responses — I’ll respond

accordingly:

1) I think this was mostly an inference on my part, based on your statement that the barred owl expansion into the Pacific Northwest may have been related to your statement that: “It is conceivable that Barred owls followed our lead as we cut corridors across the landscape.” That sounds like an indictment of logging at some level, if barred owl populations are seen as a negative thing. First, I don’t think anybody cut “corridors” for owls into the environment in the first place, and second, even if they did, birds fly and I don’t think barred owls are a bad thing; anymore than spotted owls. Maybe I misinterpreted what you were saying. If human activities caused the dispersal of a species, I think that is more normal than anything — it’s been happening for at least as long as we have been keeping records. They’re both common hoot owls, in my eyes, and I don’t see any reason to “fix” anything, if I’ve interpreted you correctly. Yep, we are in agreement that this is a political issue, and not a biological issue.

I do NOT favor the “timber industry” and think that the Big Business aspect of forest management has largely benefited by shutting down the small logging and sawmill workers and their families and communities by using the spotted owl as an “environmental issue.” However, I think rural families have been severely damaged by this process and have been played by the large-scale forestland owners. By rural families, I’m including “the poor loggers”, etc., as pawns — NOT “industry.” And I DO oppose the “government and scientists” that have benefited by this charade. Not sure if you and I are on the same page on this, but I do think I’d enjoy discussing this further with you. We’re both sincere and both opinionated, and I’m not sure we are in disagreement.

2) The person you refer to sounds like — if your description is accurate — a charlatan, NOT an “independent scientist.” Big Difference. One is a liar and a phony. The other is an independent scientist. And yes, I think anyone making such claims really should be “really, really transparent”, and not just an opportunistic fake.

3) Thanks. That was my point.

4) Yes, I do believe that in the “strictest scientific sense” that humans are part of nature, although I am not a Christian, as you might think. I believe in responsibility and accountability, though, and think the relatively recent Australian phrase that “we don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children” is exactly right if we are to survive as a species. And I don’t see human actions as “abusing nature” because “abuse” is a value term and “nature” is defined in many ways by many people. “Fouling our own nest” might be closer to my perspective — for which “nature” could care less. It’s not que sera

sera because actions have consequences, which goes back to my responsibility (for our actions) and accountability (to others) statement. “Others” can be defined as nonhuman species, too, in this regard — not just descendants.

5) You need to find a better job. You are a good thinker and articulate, and that is a joy if you think about it. Plus, absolutes are almost never good, in my opinion — please keep posting. You’re making me think hard, too, and I appreciate that.

6) That was what I was shooting for, so thanks.

Also, thanks for following up on my suggested readings. I hope you comment on the Botkin readings so others can share your thoughts. I think we’re mostly on the same page, like it or not.

© 2014 A New Century of Forest Planning
Powered by WordPress | Theme F2.

☺