

How B.C. is protecting northern spotted owl habitat

The Province and its partners are taking a multi-faceted approach to supporting the recovery of northern spotted owl populations in B.C. This strategy includes protecting old growth forest habitat and releasing spotted owls born in a breeding facility into the wild.

A species at risk of extinction

The northern spotted owl is a cherished icon of the Pacific Northwest. These elusive night hunters rely on intact old growth forests to survive. Habitat loss and competition from barred owls have put them at risk, and northern spotted owls were federally listed as endangered in 1986. Global populations have declined by 75% since 1985, and only one spotted owl was known to be living in the wild in B.C. in the spring of 2022.



GLOBAL POPULATION

75% decline since 1985

CURRENT POPULATION IN B.C.

37 in 2023

POPULATION GOAL

250 in the future (exact timeframe is uncertain)

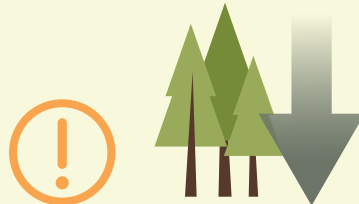
Using adaptive management, B.C. is leading work to support a population of at least 250 owls in the three regions where they historically resided in B.C. These recovery efforts will have other benefits:



Factors contributing to population decline



Competition from barred owls: The slightly larger and more aggressive barred owls outcompete northern spotted owls for nesting sites, territory and food. They also require much less habitat, so multiple barred owls can occupy a single spotted owl territory.



Habitat loss: Historically, logging has removed trees in old-growth forests where these birds make their homes, find mates and hunt prey.



Habitat fragmentation: Spotted owls need enough connected forest to meet their survival needs. Small, separated pockets of forest are not enough to sustain them.

What kind of habitat do northern spotted owls need?

Northern spotted owls live in complex old-growth forests where Douglas fir and western red cedar are often more than 200 years old. These forests provide trees for nesting, are home to small mammals (prey), and contain perches for hunting and roosting.

Foraging habitat

Northern spotted owls eat small mammals such as northern flying squirrels and bushy-tailed woodrats. Old-growth forests provide ideal foraging habitat with open spaces between trees and dense understory plants that support small mammals.

Nesting habitat

The owls nest in large-diameter trees and snags preferably over 140 years old. Unlike other birds, northern spotted owls don't build nests, but make homes in natural cavities in the sides or tops of trees.

Dispersal habitat

Juvenile spotted owls usually leave their nesting area to establish a new territory in the late fall or winter of the year they were born.

How is B.C. supporting northern spotted owl recovery?



**281,000
hectares**

Legally protecting northern spotted owl habitat in collaboration with First Nations under the Spotted Owl Management Plan, to support a long-term population of 250 owls



Controlling barred owl populations in areas where we intend to release northern spotted owls born and raised into legally protected habitat



Temporarily deferred logging in two Fraser Canyon watersheds to provide additional habitat protection



Looking ahead: Natural resource management is being transformed in B.C. We are prioritizing ecosystem health and biodiversity, in partnership with First Nations, in ways that support communities. This approach is expected to improve outcomes for species at risk, increase resilience to climate change and ensure better economic opportunities for future generations.



We run the world's first **spotted owl breeding centre and release program.**

Adaptive management is a key element of these recovery efforts, which means we are learning from the owls as we go.

We are continuously monitoring how well these recovery efforts work and making adjustments as needed to actively manage threats and ensure habitat protections are in place. This helps provide the best chance of survival for northern spotted owls and supports their ability to thrive in future.

To learn more about current northern spotted owl recovery efforts, please visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/species-ecosystems-at-risk/implementation/conservation-projects-partnerships/northern-spotted-owl

