

Spotted Owl Scientific Review Team

Terms of Reference

January 2008

1. BACKGROUND

Based on the advice of the Canadian Spotted Owl Recovery Team (CSORT)¹, the BC Government announced its Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Action Plan² in the Spring of 2006. This plan includes three components: protecting known active owl sites; revising habitat areas to better meet recovery goals; and initiating measures to rebuild Spotted Owl populations. Following this announcement, government established the Spotted Owl Population Enhancement Team³ (SOPET) to review CSORT's population augmentation advice, and to recommend the most effective means to increase the population size and recover the Spotted Owl. SOPET identified captive breeding of Spotted Owls as the highest priority action needed to augment the existing population and prevent extirpation. However, SOPET cautioned that this action must work in concert with improved habitat protection and, if owls were to remain in the wild, a strategy to manage problem Barred Owls.

In May 2007, the Minister of Environment and Minister of Agriculture and Lands approved a modified version of SOPET's Option B. This option included the capture of all juvenile and some single adult Spotted Owls for a captive breeding and re-introduction program, and the protection of active Spotted Owl sites by removing competing/predatory Barred Owls.

Ten years of experience and inventory have shown that some of the habitat protected and managed for Spotted Owls under the 1997 Spotted Owl Management Plan (SOMP) has not been used by breeding pairs of owls. As a result, it has been suggested that it may be possible to improve the distribution of habitat for the Spotted Owl population in BC by redeploying some of the protected and managed habitat to other locations. The concept of revising habitat areas has increased in importance since SOPET's March 2007 recommendation to undertake captive breeding of Spotted Owls for release back into suitable habitat in the wild.

In fall 2007, an Inter-agency Northern Spotted Owl Steering Committee (INSOSC) was established to oversee the implementation of all recovery efforts for the Spotted Owl. To effectively achieve its mandate, INSOSC established two Management Teams; one to address habitat issues and the other to address the management and re-establishment of a viable owl population (see Appendix 1). To ensure scientific credibility, INSOSC also decided to establish

¹ http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/rs%5Fspotted%5Fowl%5Fcaurina%5F1006%5Ffe%2Epdf

² http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2006AL0012-000514.htm

³ http://ilmbwww.gov.bc.ca/sarco/so/files/HWGSOPET_Proposed_5year_Action_Plan-20070330.pdf

an independent team of expert scientists to review and evaluate the work performed by the two Management Teams.

Based on the recovery goals and objectives provided by INSOSC, the Population Management Team (PMT) will be responsible for implementing all population management and research activities associated with establishing a viable Spotted Owl population in the province. In particular, the PMT will oversee inventory and monitoring of the population, captive breeding and re-introduction activities, research, and other augmentation activities including the control of problem predators and competitors of Spotted Owls.

The Habitat Team (HT) will develop a recommended habitat plan for the BC population of the Northern Spotted Owl based on the best available data, current scientific understanding, and government direction contained in the April 2006 Spotted Owl Recovery Action Plan. In developing the new habitat plan, the HT is expected to consider reconfiguring, adding to, or deleting habitat designated in the 1997 Spotted Owl Management Plan (SOMP) and recent provincial legislation, consistent with government policy on impacts. The new habitat plan will support and complement other elements of the 2006 Spotted Owl Recovery Action Plan, including the population enhancement measures recommended by the SOPET. Ultimately it is hoped that the revised habitat plan, along with other components of BC's Recovery Action Plan, will bring about recovery of the Spotted Owl in British Columbia.

Preliminary discussions have been held between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Forests and Range on the first draft of a revised habitat plan for part of the Spotted Owl's range in BC. These discussions indicate that there may be options to improve the distribution of owl habitat while maintaining or improving timber harvesting opportunities in the area. This draft plan is expected to form the basis for the initial work of the HT, but it will need to be expanded to the whole range of the Spotted Owl in BC if the consensus is that it is a promising approach. Otherwise, alternative, appropriate approaches will be developed for each forest district.

2. PURPOSE OF THE SCIENTIFIC REVIEW TEAM

The BC Government has committed to establishing an Scientific Review Team (SRT) to provide recommendations on the population management and habitat components of its Recovery Action Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl in BC. The specific purpose of the SRT is to provide scientific oversight and critical review of the principles, assumptions, and methods used by:

- the Habitat Team⁴, in developing a recommended habitat plan for the BC population of the Northern Spotted Owl and
- the Population Management Team, in developing

⁴ See the terms of reference of the Habitat Team, Population Management Team, and INSOSC for details on their purposes and organization.

- a plan for the captive breeding and re-introduction program;
- a plan for management of Barred Owls and other predators of the Spotted Owl; and
- plans for inventory, monitoring, and research.

3. OPERATING PRINCIPLES

3.1 Governance

The SRT will report directly to the INSOSC (see Appendix 1):

- The SRT will deliver its findings and recommendations to the INSOSC.
- The SRT will provide periodic updates and information to the INSOSC, and will identify any outstanding issues arising from the scientific aspects of the work of the habitat and population management teams.

3.2 SRT Membership

- K. Martin, Canadian Wildlife Service and University of British Columbia
- J. Buchanan, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- A. Harestad, Simon Fraser University
- B. Nyberg, Consultant (Co-ordinator)
- Others TBD

3.3 Member Contributions

- Members will commit to the goals, process and timing of the SRT until the plans for population management and habitat have been developed (expected by March 2009), and will have the capacity to continue after this date if required.
- Members will bring a high degree of scientific and technical credibility to the SRT.
- Members will work within these terms of reference to provide independent scientific expertise.
- Members may draw on expertise and advice from outside the SRT as required, and will inform other SRT members of who was consulted and on what subject when this occurs.
- Members must be willing to participate in a team environment.
- Members must be willing and available to respond quickly to changing information.

3.4 Participation

- Members will endeavour to participate in all SRT meetings, whether in person or by conference call.
- Members may request attendance of other experts on an ad hoc basis at SRT meetings if helpful to the population enhancement goal.
- Members will prepare for meeting by reviewing and/or providing materials, as requested by the Coordinator, prior to meeting dates.

3.5 Scientific Oversight

- To enable the Scientific Review Team to provide oversight and critical review of the revised habitat plan, the Habitat Team and Population Management Team (the Teams) will document the assumptions, principles, methods, and data used in developing the revised habitat plan and the population targets.
- The Teams will consider advice provided by the Scientific Review Team and will incorporate that advice in their plans and recommendations whenever feasible.
- When the Teams consider it infeasible to incorporate advice from the Scientific Review Team, they will document the reasons and communicate them to INSOSC for direction and the Scientific Review Team for information.

3.6 Decision-making

- Decisions on advice to the Teams will be made by consensus if possible. Consensus means that all SRT members feel that the advice is technically sound and supported by the best available information, with the view to reaching the overall goal of recovering the Spotted Owl in BC.
- If consensus is not possible, recommendations will be made by majority vote, with dissenting opinions and rationales recorded SRT report and meeting minutes.
- Decision-making will be transparent: agendas, minutes, reports and other documents will be made available to the INSOSC and the Species at Risk Coordination Office.

3.7 Confidentiality

- Members will not represent the opinion of the SRT to the public or the media. Public communications remain the role of the Coordinator.

4. GOVERNMENT DIRECTION ON IMPACTS

The BC government has determined that there is to be no net loss of habitat for the Spotted Owl or of timber supply as a result of revisions to the existing habitat plan (SOMP). This principle will guide the work of the Habitat Team, and will be respected by the SRT during its work.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Role of the SRT Coordinator:

- Establish and confirm appropriate membership in the SRT.
- Organize, conduct, and report on regular team meetings according to accepted rules of procedure.

- Produce materials for meetings and ensure team members receive these in a timely manner prior to meetings, to allow for their review.
- Ensure maintenance of SRT files and provide copies to the BC government as appropriate.
- Monitor and coordinate communication between team members.
- Provide administrative and secretariat services for the SRT.
- Consolidate the analyses and report of the SRT. The coordinator is not considered a SRT member for the purposes of providing scientific recommendations or comment on the work of the Teams.
- Present the SRT's recommendations to government through the INSOSC.
- Communicate with stakeholders, government, and the public as necessary.

5.2 Role of the SRT Members:

- Ensure that the Teams are aware of current scientific knowledge of the habitat ecology and population dynamics of the Northern Spotted Owl.
- Review the principles, assumptions, and methods proposed by the Teams and advise on their suitability for achieving the objectives of the Teams.
- Review interim products from the Teams, and suggest alternative or additional methods and analyses, where needed, that could strengthen those products.
- Review final results from the Teams, and advise INSOSC of the scientific strengths and weaknesses of the results.

Note: The Species at Risk Coordination Office will manage invoices and authorize expenditures associated with the work of the SRT, in conjunction with the SRT Coordinator and the Fraser Basin Council. Reimbursement for travel and per diem expenses will be consistent with policies of the Fraser Basin Council and the provincial government.

6. DELIVERABLES

The SRT will provide reports to INSOSC on the extent to which scientific knowledge of the ecology and population dynamics of the Northern Spotted Owl have been incorporated in the products from the Teams:

- by September 30, 2008 for the recommended habitat plan and for the population targets for re-introduction and population recovery;
- by March 31, 2009 for the re-introduction strategy and the predator management strategy.

Appendix 1

Governance Structure for Implementing the Spotted Owl Recovery Action Plan

