REJECTING SCIENCE-BASED PROTECTION FOR SPOTTED OWLS

Failed: 25-72

SUMMARY:

The Senate rejected a Congressional Review Act resolution to overturn a science-based plan under the Endangered Species Act which outlines necessary conservation actions to stop the imminent extinction of the northern spotted owl (*October 29, 2025, Roll Call No. 597).*

BACKGROUND:

Northern spotted owls are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) but were found to warrant uplisting to endangered in December 2020 due to their continued steep decline. Since monitoring began in 1990, northern spotted owls have lost at least 77% of their old-growth forest habitat in Washington, 68% in Oregon, and roughly 50% in California. Study sites also found a 65% to 85% decrease in population size within the same time span. Northern spotted owls are in a freefall towards extinction, and swift action must be taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to prevent it.

Historically, habitat loss from timber harvesting and habitat conversion has been the primary threat to northern spotted owl survival, but barred owls now significantly exacerbate the situation, preventing spotted owl recovery. There is clear evidence that barred owls — an aggressive and very successful invasive species — are a significant threat to northern spotted owls; barred owls are larger and more aggressive than spotted owls, have smaller home ranges, and have a wider diet. As a result, barred owls outcompete spotted owls for habitat and prey. Research demonstrates that lethal removal of invasive barred owls from spotted owl habitat is a highly effective tool for stemming the decline of imperiled owls and allowing them a chance to recover.

On August 19, 2024, FWS published the Barred Owl Management Strategy, which outlines necessary science-based conservation actions under the ESA to stop the imminent extinction of the northern spotted owl, primarily by mitigating the negative impact of invasive barred owls. While the killing of one species for the good of another should not be used without careful evaluation, removal of invasive species is a widely practiced and often effective tool for protecting biodiversity and imperiled species. The Strategy was created after careful consideration and use of scientific best practices; it is an appropriate and necessary conservation measure for the northern spotted owl.

In July 2025, Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) introduced S.J. Res. 69, a Congressional Review Act Resolution (CRA), to overturn the Strategy. The resolution inappropriately substituted political calculation for scientific decision-making under the ESA. Its passage could have also permanently blocked similar efforts to save the northern spotted owl in the future due to the CRA's provision preventing issuance of a rule that is "substantially the same." As the spotted owl careens towards extinction, expert wildlife agencies and the best available science should govern the critical conservation decisions that are necessary to save the species.

OUTCOME:

On October 29, 2025, the Senate rejected S.J. Res. 69, 25-72. "No" was the pro-conservation vote.