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Commentary

Stupid Human Tricks: The Sad Case of the Spotted Owl

By Tom DeWeese

CNSNews.com Commentary

June 29, 2007

Environmentalists are quick to lecture the rest of us about the ways of nature. Don't clean the dead trees off the forest floor, it's natural. Cattle and horses on the range aren't native, so let the grizzlies and wolves devour them, it's natural. Man isn't part of the ecology, lock him out of vast areas of land, it's natural. It's interesting to note how the "natural" argument only applies when it is used to impose the radical environmental agenda. Case in point, the Northern Spotted Owl.

Spotted owls, we were told a decade ago, were disappearing because big bad timber companies were cutting down "old growth" forests. So the environmental movement rushed to the forests, hugged the trees and issued news releases to decry the evils of the logging industry. Save the owl. Save the trees. Kill the timber industry.

Of course, that was exactly the point. Kill the timber industry. As a result of the hysteria to save the "endangered" owls, U.S. timber sales were reduced by 80-90%, forcing saw mills to close, loggers to go broke and whole towns which depended on the industry to literally disappear. The federal crackdown on the industry caused a shift in U.S. domestic lumber supplies to foreign soils. In short, American industry suffered in the name of protecting the spotted owl. Turns out it wasn't true.

A decade and thousands of broken dreams later, comes this report from the federal government on the real reasons for the spotted owl's endangerment: "Oops."

According to a new government draft plan to save the species, scientists are no longer saying the greatest threat to the Spotted Owl is logging activity. "The draft recovery plan recognizes the primary threat to northern spotted owls as competition with barred owls." According to the report, barred owls are less selective about the habitat they use and the prey they feed upon and are out competing northern spotted owls for habitat and food, causing its decline.

In fact, for the entire decade since the issue emerged on the political scene, the property rights and land use movements have been reporting the fact that the spotted owl is only a sub-species of Mexican spotted

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owls, which are not endangered at all. Some experts will say the only way to tell the difference between the two is by their accents. (OK, I'm kidding, but this ridiculous story needs some humor).

It was no secret that the spotted owl didn't need "old growth forests" to survive, since spotted owls were found living under bridges and in McDonald signs. What it needed was a good food source like any other species. Now we know it was undercut by another owl - a completely natural occurrence.

What was accomplished during the ten-year fight besides the destruction of an entire industry? The establishment of a very radical and dangerous political agenda called the environmental movement. Its power is now so great that no politician dare oppose them.

Yet, that power, we now know for certain, was built on a lie. Some in the movement have even candidly admitted that if they didn't have the spotted owl they would have invented something like it to drive their agenda. In fact they did invent it and the purpose was to destroy the timber industry and private property rights. They called it an environmental emergency.

Now the truth has come out. So, will the same federal government which rushed to impose harsh treatment of innocent property owners and industry now roll back those stifling regulations and let freedom breath? Of course not. Agendas are agendas, regardless of the facts.

So instead, after the nation spent millions of dollars to destroy an industry's private property rights, still, the government plans to spend \$200 million more on a "barred owl removal plan" in order to save the spotted owl.

And as usual, when a new government debacle is rolled out, there is always an emergency to drive the policy. Now, according to Ren Lohefener, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Region, "Because the range and numbers of barred owls are expanding rapidly, our effectiveness in addressing this threat depends on immediate action..."

Here's an immediate action sane folks could recommend: Let the barred owls alone to do what comes natural to them. If the Spotted Owl can't keep up - then good riddance. It's been used to cause enough pain and obviously its time is up. It's a natural process. Species come and go. We've got plenty of Mexican spotted owls to play with if we get homesick for them.

Of course, the final chapter is yet to be written. Soon, if the new "recovery plan" is successful, it won't be long before the environmental movement has a new emergency -- man's wanton destruction of the barred owl. Creating false environmental disasters just comes natural for some people.

(Tom DeWeese is the editor of The DeWeese Report and president of the [American Policy Center](#), an activist think tank headquartered in Warrenton, Va.)

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