

Tighter review of owl habitat rejected

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Washington state's Forest Practices Board has rejected a request to more closely study timber cutting in the spotted owl's remaining habitat.

The board's Wednesday ruling turned back a plan for meticulous environmental reviews of logging on approximately 115,000 acres designated for "special emphasis" in helping the endangered bird.

The state of Washington has 7.8 million acres of private forestland containing roughly 178,000 acres of spotted owl habitat, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported, noting wildlife officials aren't sure how many owls remain, but they say two-thirds of nesting sites identified a decade ago have been abandoned.

Instead of the reviews, the board urged environmentalists, timber companies, Indian tribes and the government to resolve their differences with the help of a professional "facilitator."

The ruling was not applauded by environment groups.

"They didn't do anything that will change anything on the ground by the time the birds' nesting season starts March 1," Nina Carter, executive director of Audubon Washington, told the Post-Intelligencer.

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