To: Representative Earl Blumenauer
   Representative Jared Huffman
   Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
   Senator Patty Murray

RE: Trump’s attack on spotted owl habitat destabilizes the rural economy and breeds far right extremism.

Dear Members of Congress,

We applaud your intervention last week calling on Inspector Genera Mark Lee Greenblatt to investigate the Trump Administration’s last-minute decision to lift 3.5 million acres of critical habitat protection for the northern spotted owl. Like many Trump era decisions, this one was reckless, at odds with science, and untethered from the socioeconomic realities of Pacific Northwest communities. As organizations with large memberships and supporters in these communities, we are dismayed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s justification for its action - that it was needed to protect community stability, the local tax base, and the custom and culture of rural communities. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Please find attached a socioeconomic analysis prepared by Center for Sustainable Economy and Natural Resource Economics providing extensive evidence that, contrary to the USFWS’s erroneous conclusions, the economic and social costs of lifting spotted owl protections and allowing more logging will be far greater than any additional benefits to an already bloated timber industry that controls far too much of our land base. In particular, more logging promises to set back rather than aid economically distressed rural towns by perpetuating overreliance on an industry that breeds community instability and a culture and custom that helped incubate Timber Unity, the Proud Boys and other far right extremist groups that took part in the insurrection on Capitol Hill.

Overreliance on the timber industry is also a big drain on local public finance since logging corporations are good at evading taxes and making taxpayers bear the burden of degraded and depleted water supplies, lost hunting and fishing opportunities, increased fire risk and climate change.

Also find attached a sixty-day notice of our intent to sue the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to force reinstatement of critical habitat protection on the grounds that the consideration of benefits and costs was grossly negligent and runs afoul of Section 4(b)2 of the Act and its implementing regulations. In particular, the Service concluded that more logging is necessary to protect community stability, the local tax base, and the customs and culture of rural towns when in fact the opposite it true - maintaining and restoring owl habitat has a wide range of socioeconomic benefits that far outweigh the value of these lands for timber production.
We thank you in advance for anything you can do to reverse Trump’s parting shot against owl habitat and the community and economic benefits these forests provide. We are also eager to discuss legislation to revamp US forest policy to get at the root of the problem—lax laws and environmentally harmful subsidies that have let big logging corporations colonize far too much of America’s prime forests and corrupt local politics in their quest for power and profit. In particular, we believe there is widespread consensus for legislation that:

- Halts any further growth of the timber industry’s footprint into endangered wild forests. Tragically, America has lost over 90% of its natural forests yet these very forests are badly needed to mitigate against climate change, save thousands of imperiled species, provide blueprints for restoring healthy forest cover and support a wide range of ecosystem services rural communities need to diversify and grow.

- Reforms corporate land ownership laws to restrict and eventually phase out ownership of prime forests and farmlands by Wall Street, foreign, and other large corporations that have destabilized rural communities and are crowding out sustainable forest management by family foresters, land trusts, and community organizations.

- Redirects billions of dollars of federal, state, and local subsidies away from short rotation corporate tree plantations to instead support climate smart and community smart forest practices like long rotations, selective harvesting, and preserving forests for their carbon storage benefits.

We look forward to discussing these and other options with you as the 117th Congress begins the process of repairing the enormous damages from the Trump Administration.

Yours truly,

John Talberth, Ph.D.
Ernie Niemi
Center for Sustainable Economy
Natural Resource Economics
jtalberth@sustainable-economy.org
ernie.niemi@nreconomics.com
(510) 384-5724
(541) 505-2704

Rio Davidson
Chuck Willer
Lincoln County Community Rights
Coast Range Association
riodavidson@gmail.com
chuckw@coastrange.org
(541) 961-5606
(541) 231-6651