



# THE PACIFIC FOREST TRUST

*Working Forests Work Wonders For Us All.*

**Embargoed for Release:**

March 5, 2009

**Photos Are Available**

**Media Contact:**

Chris Harrison, Communications Manager  
415-561-0700 or [charrison@pacificforest.org](mailto:charrison@pacificforest.org)

## **Safe Harbor: Good for Spotted Owls, Good for Landowners**

*Innovative Agreement with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rewards Habitat Protection,  
Ensures Sustainable Timber Harvests from California Redwood Forest*

ARCATA, Calif. – When biologists start looking for Northern Spotted Owls in spring, their “hooting” might sound a warning for some forest landowners. The threatened owl’s answering call can lead to increased regulatory restrictions on how private land is used. But those concerns have been eased for owners of the Van Eck Forest in Humboldt, California.

A Working Forest Conservation Easement on the Van Eck Forest helped its owner obtain a Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) for the owl at the end of last year. The agreement ensures that restoring habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl – a declining species whose protection often polarizes the forest community – won’t threaten the Van Eck Forest’s economic interests.

The Agreement was negotiated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the non-profit Pacific Forest Trust (PFT), which manages the 2,200-acre redwood forest on behalf of the Fred M. van Eck Forest Foundation. The property produces wood, water, wildlife habitat and contributes to a well-balanced climate, being the state’s first registered carbon emissions reduction project.

“This agreement is a triple win that rewards landowners for good habitat stewardship,” says PFT President Laurie Wayburn. “Owls win, because their habitat is enhanced and conserved. Landowners win, because they can manage their forests to encourage biodiversity without fear that doing so will cripple their operations if they’re too successful in voluntarily attracting wildlife. The public, state and federal regulators win because this cooperative approach will help meet their goals of permanently preserving endangered species and their habitat.”

Safe Harbor Agreements are used to promote conservation of endangered and threatened species on privately owned land. They encourage landowners to foster wildlife habitat on their property without fear that doing so might expose them to increased restriction on future use of their land under the terms of the federal Endangered Species Act.

“This Safe Harbor Agreement is an innovative example of how a private landowner and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can work together to bring about meaningful and lasting conservation changes,” says Ren Lohofener, Director of the USFWS Pacific Southwest Region. “This SHA with the Pacific Forest Trust can be a model for other landowners and timber companies in Northern California. Under this agreement, timber can continue to be harvested, but it will be done so in a way that will ultimately grow more habitat for Northern Spotted Owls.”

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## Van Eck Safe Harbor Agreement — page 2 of 2

The Pacific Forest Trust deliberately manages the Van Eck Forest to attract and sustain wildlife. The Working Forest Conservation Easement on the property prevents development and guides its management to restore an older, more natural forest structure that increases storage of carbon dioxide while maintaining or exceeding the timber yields found on more traditionally managed properties. Furthermore, the restorative management also creates the mature forest conditions owls need for habitat.

These habitat restoration efforts are proving effective. A pair of owls have been spotted in and around the Van Eck Forest, land which is surrounded primarily by more intensively harvested properties in an increasingly fragmented landscape. PFT applied for the Safe Harbor Agreement to ensure sustainable timber harvests can continue, even as the owls are attracted to the Van Eck's maturing groves.

The Fish and Wildlife Service scrutinized the conservation easement provisions that formed the foundation of the Safe Harbor Agreement and granted the SHA under a streamlined process. The SHA gives precise boundaries for areas that won't be logged when owls are nearby or nesting, as well as indicating areas that will remain accessible for harvest as more owls are attracted to the property.

In consideration of the easement's provisions and permanence, the USFWS granted the Van Eck Forest a maximum SHA term of 90 years. Normally, a SHA might only last 10 to 20 years, at which point habitat protection could revert to a baseline reflecting pre-agreement conditions – potentially allowing for a complete loss of restored habitat.

Currently, the property sustains 1,730 acres of potential Northern Spotted Owl habitat and one owl "activity center" where owls have been observed. In early March, a biologist will be out "hooting" to see if those owls have returned and if others may have joined them for the 2009 breeding season. It is estimated that as many as five owl activity centers could exist by the end of the agreement's 90-year term.

### **About The Pacific Forest Trust**

The Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) is the leading non-profit organization dedicated to protecting America's working forests for all their public benefits – wood, water, wildlife and a well-balanced climate. Since its founding in 1993, PFT has directly conserved 45,000 acres of forestlands in California, Oregon and Washington valued at more than \$150 million. Through its *Working Forests, Winning Climate* initiative, PFT is advising landowners, state governments and federal leaders about the inclusion of forest conservation and sustainable management in climate policies, markets and best practices. To learn more about the Pacific Forest Trust, please visit <http://www.PacificForest.org>

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