Draft ACCG Consensus-based California spotted owl (CSO) Protected Activity Center (PAC)

Retirement Amendment

for inclusion in Forest Projects Plan (FPP), Phase 2

ACCG Forest Plan Amendment Ad Hoc 7/10/2023

The draft amendment and questions were discussed at the TAG meeting (July 19th, 2023). The yellow highlighted sections below were results from the TAG meeting. Using that information and the discussion at the Ad Hoc meeting this week, August 14th, 2023, *a revised draft was created.*

Background: ACCG’s Forest Plan Amendment Ad Hoc is a sub working group of the Planning work group that was formed in fall 2022. The group is charged with discussing, and ultimately

developing, consensus-based forest plan amendments related to California spotted owl (CSO) for inclusion in Forest Projects Plan (FPP), Phase 2. The Ad Hoc group is made up of individuals who have applicable expertise and knowledge, including USFS wildlife specialists, USFS NEPA

specialists, environmental groups, non-government wildlife specialists, FPP Phase 2 team, and others.

Purpose of this document: The Ad Hoc would like to gain feedback and expert input from the FPP Phase 2 Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on the Ad Hoc’s proposed *first-iteration draft* consensus- based forest plan amendment related to PAC retirement (see next paragraph). Additionally, the Ad Hoc members would appreciate if the TAG would provide feedback on the below questions

directly related to the draft proposed amendment, to help flush out specifics of the draft amendment language.

DRAFT consensus-based amendment reads,

*California spotted owl (CSO) protected activity center (PAC) retirement would be allowed after 5 years of surveys (e.g., protocol-level surveys, using autonomous recordings units, ARUs, as an*

*additive tool) indicating non-occupancy (i.e., territorial singles or reproductive pairs).*

DRAFT amendment-related questions for the TAG:

John Keene relayed some background information before we dug into the individual questions which included the fact that the spotted owl population has been and is expected to continue to decline (approximately 50% since 1992 to present), so there will likely continue to be more PACs in the project area that will become unoccupied through the life of the Phase 2 project.

Owls show a regular distribution geographically, this spacing should be considered when making the decision to retire a PAC, potentially retaining currently unoccupied PACs I the “gaps” for future owl recolonization.

1. The Ad Hoc proposes that all PACs that are shown to be occupied be retained, versus only PACs that have pair or better occupancy. Is there a reason the TAG would advise against

this?

TAG/John Keene weighed in on this and was supportive of retaining Occupied PACs, as well as looking at the geographic spacing of the PACs, considering that the owls tend to space themselves fairly evenly across the landscape, and consider retaining PACs in the “gaps” between other Occupied PACs, even if the PAC meets retirement eligibility based on survey results and past history.

1. Is 5 years of surveys the “gold standard” for determining lack of occupancy? If the answer is no, what is the appropriate number of years of surveys?

TAG/John Keene indicated that there is no “gold standard” but that the proposed 5 years seemed prudent and should make it unlikely that a PAC would meet eligibility requirements and surveys would have missed the Occupied status of the PAC.

1. Related to question #2, which survey type would be most appropriate/make the most sense: protocol-level surveys, ARUs, or a combination of both? Would two years of

traditional protocol-level surveys followed by three years of ARUs be adequate for purposes of PAC retirement?

TAG/John Keene agreed that ARU surveys (either protocol or retrieving the data at the end of the season), and traditional surveys should both yield Occupancy status for use in determining eligibility for retirement. John K. pointed out that traditional surveys, or full protocol ARU surveys would yield better information on reproductive status, nest/roost locations, etc. for use in project/implementation planning. Depending on desired project for the survey data, funding and staffing availability there are advantages to completing the traditional surveys at the beginning of the survey period vs. following ARU surveys, and these should be considered when conducting the surveys.

Revised Amendment post TAG meeting and August 14, 2023, Ad Hoc meeting:

*California spotted owl (CSO) protected activity centers (PACs) would be deemed eligible for retirement after 5 years of surveys indicating non-occupancy (i.e., territorial singles or reproductive pairs).*

*All PACs that meet occupied status as a result of these surveys, occupied defined as set forth the in the spotted owl survey protocol would be retained as PACs.*

*Ideally the 5 years of surveys would be consecutive years but failing that, 5 years of survey in a 7-year period would be acceptable to determine eligibility. Surveys would include a minimum of 2 years of the traditional surveys, with the balance of the 5 years using either ARUs or traditional methods.*

*Before initiating the surveys to determine eligibility, a geographic analysis, or gap analysis, of the PAC in question’s location in relation to the other PACs to determine: if regardless of eligibility, the PAC should be retained to fill a gap in the spacing of occupied PACs now, and opportunity for recolonization of the species in the future. This analysis should be revisited, if eligibility is met for retirement, to evaluate whether new information, or changed circumstances/conditions would indicate that the PAC should be retained at that time for biological or other reasons.*

**Terms Defined for this Recommended Amendment**

**Activity Center=** the best status location for an occupied spotted owl territory, (nest, roost, night detection)

**PAC=** Protected Activity Center: 300 acres of the best habitat, surrounding the activity center.

**Traditional Survey:** Surveys conducted using Region 5 California Spotted Owl Protocol, using a combination of night broadcast calling from set call points, and follow ups during the day using broadcast, aural and visual detections**.**

**ARU=**Automated Recording Units

**ARU Surveys=** Surveys using the ARUs, in this case there are different levels of ARU survey that could be employed, occupancy status could be derived by placing adequate numbers of ARUs out in/around the PAC at the beginning of the breeding season, retrieving ARUs and analyzing the data at the end of the breeding season to determine occupancy, potentially at a lower cost and staff effort level.