

Pacific Seabird Group



DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF PACIFIC SEABIRDS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

Daniel D. Roby, Ph.D.
Chair
104 Nash Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, Oregon 97331-3803
541-737-1955
Daniel.Roby@orst.edu

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation
4953 Sonoma Mountain Road
Santa Rosa, California 95404
202-778-2240
charrison@hunton.com

Robert H. Day, Ph.D.
Chair-Elect
ABR, Inc.--Environmental Research & Services
P.O. Box 80410
Fairbanks, AK 99708-0410
907-455-6777
bday@abrinc.com

12 November 2004

Steven A. Williams, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

RE: Status of Marbled Murrelets in North America

Dear Director Williams:

On behalf of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), we write to express our concern about the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's recent decision to reanalyze whether the California, Oregon, and Washington population of Marbled Murrelets (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) is a distinct population segment suitable for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. We understand that the decision made at Headquarters over-ruled a decision made in the Pacific Regional Office in Portland. PSG is an international, non-profit organization that was founded in 1972 to promote the knowledge, study, and conservation of Pacific seabirds. It has a membership drawn from the entire Pacific basin, including Canada, Mexico, Russia, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA. Among PSG's members are biologists and scientists who have research interests in Pacific seabirds, government officials who manage seabird refuges and populations, and individuals who are interested in marine conservation. For two decades, PSG has taken an active lead in resolving many scientific aspects of the biology and conservation of Marbled Murrelets. PSG has served as an unbiased forum for government, university, and private sector biologists to discuss and resolve such issues.

We understand that the Headquarters office of the USFWS concluded that the California, Oregon, and Washington population is not discrete, as required under USFWS' 1996 "Discrete

Population Segment” policy, whereas the Pacific Regional Office concluded that the listed population is discrete. Under the revised analysis, USFWS Headquarters concluded that there is no marked distinction in the physical, ecological, or behavioral attributes of the species at the U.S./Canada border, and found no significant evidence of genetic or morphological discontinuity between populations at the U.S./Canadian border. We also understand that in this revision the USFWS Headquarters determined that there are no significant differences in control, exploitation, management of habitat, conservation status, or regulatory mechanisms across the international border. However no data were provided to demonstrate that this is the case, and further information reviewed by PSG indicates significant differences in management of the species and habitat between Canada (DeChesne-Mansiere 2004 <http://www.fpb.gov.bc.ca/SPECIAL/reports/SR21/MAMUBackgroundReport_AugustFinalVersion.pdf>) and the U.S.

FWS has announced that it will now conduct a status review of the Marbled Murrelet throughout its entire range. We understand that, during this status review, you will consider whether the tri-state population constitutes a significant portion of the population of the entire species and whether the species as a whole is in danger of extinction. Although we appreciate that Congress directed the USFWS to use its authority to list Discrete Population Segments “sparingly,” it is our collective professional opinion that the Marbled Murrelet in California, Oregon, and Washington constitutes a bona fide Discrete Population Segment under the 1996 policy. We request that during the forthcoming status review the USFWS Headquarters reconsider certain aspects of the conclusions that it reached during the five-year review, in addition to the other questions that the Service has posed. Specifically, we believe that more genetic work needs to be undertaken to determine whether there are genetic differences between the population in Canada and that in the tri-state area. The genetic work conducted to date, including work done by members of PSG, has not been designed to directly address this question. However, current work suggests that populations from California and the Aleutian Islands differ both from each other and from populations in British Columbia and mainland Alaska. Other data presented in the five-year status review, including continued population declines, nest failure due to human disturbance and habitat fragmentation, and continued loss of nesting habitat despite the Northwest Forest Plan, should be seriously considered during the status review.

The Pacific Region’s compendium of information during the five-year status review indicates that the tri-state population of Marbled Murrelets continues to decline and that it continues to need protection. In addition, there are new data that indicate that the species is declining throughout significant portions of its range in Alaska. Evaluating the status of the species throughout its range and especially in the tri-state area need to be considered a high priority for the status review.

Finally, PSG recommends that the status review be conducted by the regional scientists and biologists, both within and outside the USFWS, who are most familiar with the ecology and

Director Steven A. Williams
12 November 2004
Page 3

population status of the species. PSG, especially its Marbled Murrelet Technical Committee, has been both a catalyst and an unbiased forum for resolving many of the questions related to the conservation and the biology of Marbled Murrelets. In fact, we will be holding a Special Paper Session on the status of Marbled Murrelet populations range-wide at our annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, in January 2005. Please contact us if we can be of further assistance at any time during the forthcoming status review.

Sincerely,

/s/ Craig S. Harrison

Craig S. Harrison
Vice Chair for Conservation

cc David Allen, Regional Director