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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2023WLRS0053-001493  
Sept. 24, 2023

Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship

### **Province continues spotted owl recovery efforts with release of two birds into the wild**

SPUZZUM – Two spotted owls have been released into protected habitat in the Fraser Canyon as part of ongoing work the Province is doing in partnership with Spuzzum First Nation to recover northern spotted owl populations in B.C.’s wild.

The two male owls, named ‘sítist’ [te-syst] and ‘wíkcn’ [week-chin], were released after being assessed as healthy and ready to fend for themselves, and demonstrating that they could capture live prey and maintain a stable body weight. The door to their aviary was opened on July 25, 2023, to allow the owls to forage on their own and acclimatize to their new surroundings.

“Supporting the recovery of threatened species in B.C. is a priority for my ministry,” said Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. “That’s why we’re running the world’s only captive breeding and release program for northern spotted owls. Our strategy and the decisions we’re making to support spotted owl recovery are based on the best available science and Indigenous knowledge.”

This is the Spotted Owl Breeding and Release Program’s second release of captive-bred spotted owls into the wild. Sítist was originally released in August 2022 as part of the program’s first release. That autumn, sítist was found injured near train tracks in the Fraser Canyon. He was later rehabilitated by the Orphaned Wildlife Society and returned to the Captive Breeding Facility where he made a full recovery. In May 2023, ministry staff confirmed the other two owls released with sítist in 2022 had died from unknown causes.

“We have a dedicated team of experts that includes First Nations and ministry staff that are doing everything they can to help spotted owls recover. We are hopeful, but this is a long process with no guarantee of success,” Cullen said. “The first release helped us learn more about raising and releasing captive-bred birds into the wild and has informed our existing protocols and procedures for transporting, releasing and supporting released owls. We remain committed to doing everything we can to support the recovery of northern spotted owls and continue to learn from the released owls to support their species’ survival.”

Ministry staff and project partners continue to monitor the progress of sítist and wíkcn, and are prepared to adapt management strategies as needed to ensure they have the best possible chance of survival in the wild.

#### **Quick Facts:**

- The Province has protected more than 280,000 hectares of spotted owl habitat, an area equivalent to about 690 Stanley Parks, which is enough to support a future population of 125 breeding pairs.

- The released owls were given Spuzzum names: ‘sítist’ means “night” and ‘wíkn’ translates to “I see you.”

**Learn More:**

Northern Spotted Owl Recovery and Breeding Program:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/species-ecosystems-at-risk/implementation/conservation-projects-partnerships/northern-spotted-owl>

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