

July 31, 2008

Contact: Chris Tollefson 703/358 2222
Chris_Tollefson@fws.gov

Secretary Kempthorne Announces New Conservation Mechanism for Threatened and Endangered Species

Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne today announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed an innovative new tool designed to help federal agencies conserve imperiled species on non-federal lands. The recovery crediting system will give federal agencies greater flexibility to offset impacts to threatened and endangered species caused by their actions by undertaking conservation efforts on non-federal lands, with the requirement that there is a net benefit to recovery of the species impacted.

President Bush first announced this new recovery crediting guidance during his visit to Patuxent Research Refuge in Maryland with Secretary Kempthorne on October 20, 2007. A draft version of the guidance was later published in the Federal Register on November 2, 2007 for public comment.

“Federal agencies play a key role in the recovery of hundreds of threatened and endangered species, but they cannot succeed without the support of private landowners,” said Secretary Kempthorne. “This recovery crediting system will make it easier for agencies to work with local communities and landowners to benefit imperiled plant and animal species across the nation.”

“The recovery crediting system serves as an additional cooperative conservation tool that will provide incentives for private landowners to conserve endangered species,” said Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

Under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), federal agencies are required to use their existing authorities to conserve threatened and endangered species and, in consultation with the Service, ensure that their actions do not jeopardize listed species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. Section 7 applies to the management of federal lands as well as other federal actions that may affect listed species, such as federal approval of private activities through the issuance of permits and licenses.

Federal agencies will be able to use a recovery crediting system to create a “bank” of credits accrued through beneficial conservation actions undertaken on non-federal lands. A federal agency can develop and store these conservation credits for use at a later time to offset the impacts of its actions. Credits must be used to benefit the same species for which they were accrued. The Service will review each recovery crediting system to ensure the net benefits to recovery outweigh any potential impacts that could occur during project implementation. Each proposal will be evaluated on its own merit, and some activities related to particular listed species may not be appropriate for the new credit system.

The program is modeled on a pilot program developed at Fort Hood in Texas involving the Service, the Department of Defense, the Texas State Department of Agriculture and other

agencies. Using the pilot recovery crediting system, the U.S. Army has been able to fund habitat conservation and restoration projects with willing local landowners on more than seven thousand acres of private land surrounding the military base to benefit the endangered golden-cheeked warbler. Fort Hood provides important training areas for troops deploying to Iraq and is also home to the largest known population of golden-cheeked warblers in its breeding range. The credits accrued through these off-base conservation efforts ensure that the Army can conduct mission-critical field training at Fort Hood while continuing to benefit the warbler in its home range. Fort Hood has also been able to build important partnerships through this pilot program that will continue to benefit the golden-cheeked warbler and other imperiled species.

“So many of our nation’s imperiled species live on non-federal land,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall. “This system will make it easier for other federal agencies to reach out to the American people and work with landowners to do what we can’t do alone.”

A notice of the availability of the guidance was published in the Federal Register on July 31, 2008. The guidance may also be downloaded from the Service’s web site at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/policy/june.2008.html>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

-FWS-