



# News Release

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[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)

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## **RANCHER GROUP DEVELOPS HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN SEEKS ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PERMIT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Malpai Borderlands Group invite public review, suggestions and comments on a draft habitat conservation plan (HCP). The plan is designed to implement grassland & watershed improvement activities and allow area ranchers to enroll to cover specific ranch management activities while minimizing and offsetting potential adverse effects to 19 wildlife and plant species of concern – nine protected under the Endangered Species Act. After public concerns are addressed, the Service will review the plan before determining whether to issue a permit allowing Malpai and rancher-enrollees to take threatened and endangered species if it occurs incidentally to their operations.

Malpai Borderlands Group has drafted an HCP that proposes grassland improvement projects – including prescribed fires and fire use, erosion control structures and mechanical brush removal projects. The draft plan also addresses routine ranch management activities – including construction of fences, pipelines and roads; livestock management; and use and maintenance of livestock ponds/tanks.

Projects to improve grasslands and ranch management outlined in the draft plan may result in the taking of threatened or endangered species and have short-term impacts to species and their habitats. But through these activities, long-term benefits for the watersheds and species are anticipated.

Federally threatened and endangered species are protected from “take,” including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying their habitat. The Service may however, under limited circumstances, issue permits to take federally listed species when such a taking is incidental to – and not the purpose of – otherwise lawful activities and the taking does not jeopardize the continued survival of the species.

In the past, endangered species issues in the Malpai Borderlands have been addressed on an inefficient, project-by-project basis. As a result, Malpai has drafted the HCP as a more comprehensive alternative to multiple individual consultations frequently conducted through other federal agency intermediaries.

The endangered and threatened species that occur in the Malpai Borderlands include Yaqui chub, Yaqui topminnow, Yaqui catfish, beautiful shiner, Huachuca water-umbel (a plant), northern Aplomado falcon, Mexican spotted owl, Chiricahua leopard frog, and New Mexico ridge-nosed rattlesnake. The candidate yellow-billed cuckoo and nine other species of concern are also considered in the draft HCP.

The proposed incidental take could occur as a result of grassland improvement and ranch management activities on non-Federal lands within approximately 828,000 acres of the Malpai borderlands region of Cochise County, Arizona and Hidalgo County, New Mexico.

Malpai Borderlands Group is a private, non-profit organization composed of ranchers who live in the Malpai borderlands. The group was established in 1994 to represent and pursue the interests of that ranching community. It seeks to do so by maintaining and improving the area's open space values, traditional ranching economies, biodiversity, and natural habitats through cooperation and partnership among the various entities—state, Federal, and private—having an interest or role in achieving these goals. Malpai Borderlands Group thus seeks to balance sustainable ranching with sound land stewardship, and to do so by developing strategic alliances among the ranching, conservation, regulatory, and scientific communities.

Developing the Malpai Borderlands HCP is a public process and the Service is seeking public comment. The draft HCP and supporting documents are available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>. Comments and requests for hard copies of the draft documents should be sent to Mr. Steven L. Spangle, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Ste 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021, (602) 242-0210. All comments should be received by Aug. 31, 2007.

For further information on the HCP contact Mr. Marty Tuegel at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tucson Office, 201 N. Bonita Avenue, Suite 141, Tucson, Arizona, 85745, (520) 670-6150 ext. 232, or by email at [Marty\\_Tuegel@fws.gov](mailto:Marty_Tuegel@fws.gov).

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 547 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.

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