



News Release

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INCIDENTAL TAKE PERMIT ISSUED TO SALT RIVER PROJECT FOR OPERATION OF ROOSEVELT DAM AND LAKE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a 50-year permit to Salt River Project (SRP) to “take” endangered southwestern willow flycatchers, threatened bald eagles, endangered Yuma clapper rails, and yellow-billed cuckoos (a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection) incidental to operation of Theodore Roosevelt Dam and Lake in Maricopa and Gila counties, Arizona. SRP has committed to implementing the Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan, which will mitigate (offset) and minimize the taking of threatened and endangered species.

Since 1996, lower-than-usual rainfall and snowmelt have resulted in lowered water levels in Roosevelt Lake. Six years of declining water levels have exposed the nutrient-rich sediment deposited where Tonto Creek and the Salt River flow into the reservoir. As a result, dense riparian vegetation has germinated and flourished on both deltas. The new habitat has resulted in the immigration and expansion of the southwestern willow flycatcher population to about 275 birds in 2002. Bald eagles and yellow-billed cuckoos also use the reservoir and its riparian woodlands, and the Yuma clapper rail was found at Roosevelt Lake for the first time in 2002.

“Take” of a listed species – including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying its habitat – can be permitted by the Service under limited circumstances 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.

When rain and snow runoff conditions again replenish water-stores required by Phoenix area water users, new delta habitat now relied upon by flycatchers and other listed species will be periodically inundated. This refilling of the reservoir will adversely affect breeding habitat and will result in the harassment, harm and possible death of some listed birds. When the reservoir is drawn down for long periods, habitat may dry out as well, again resulting in take.

SRP developed the Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan to fully minimize and mitigate impacts to the flycatcher, bald eagle, clapper rail, and yellow-billed cuckoo. Under the plan, SRP will acquire and protect in perpetuity at least 1,500 acres of riparian habitat on the San Pedro, Verde, and Gila rivers, or other river

systems in Arizona, and implement other conservation measures to protect up to 750 additional acres of habitat. The Plan also includes rescue of bald eagle eggs and nestlings whose nests are threatened by inundation, monitoring of the species and habitat at Roosevelt Lake and in the mitigation areas, and other measures. All mitigation will be in place within 3 years.

Concurrent with the development of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the Service prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to analyze the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the proposed Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan and its alternatives. The preferred alternative described in the EIS (full operation of Roosevelt Dam and Lake with accompanying mitigation and minimization measures) was adopted as the selected alternative in our National Environmental Policy Act Record of Decision. Development of the HCP and EIS was a public process that included extensive public review and input in the form of advisory groups, scoping meetings, a public hearing, and public review of the draft conservation plan and EIS. Public comments influenced the final plan and EIS and accompanying Record of Decision. The Service also prepared a biological opinion to evaluate the effects of the preferred alternative on the listed species. The opinion found that implementation of the preferred alternative is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species.

Since 1911, Roosevelt Dam and Lake has provided water for power generation, irrigation, municipal and other uses. Today, SRP manages Roosevelt together with three other reservoirs on the Salt River and two on the Verde River to supply water to 3 million people in the cities of Phoenix, Mesa, Chandler, Tempe, Gilbert, Scottsdale, Tolleson and Avondale. Irrigation water is provided to agricultural lands in the Phoenix area, and SRP delivers Roosevelt water to the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, Gila River Indian Community, Buckeye Irrigation Company, Roosevelt Irrigation District, Roosevelt Water Conservation District and others. Additionally, Roosevelt and other SRP reservoirs provide a variety of recreational uses in central Arizona.

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 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 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 governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

-FWS-

Note to Editors: The habitat conservation plan (including maps of the lake and habitat areas), EIS, Record of Decision, and photographs (image library) of the affected species are available on the Service's website at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov/> or by request from the listed contacts.