

necessary to best administer the Refuge to protect these values and to fulfill Refuge purposes. The Comprehensive Conservation Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement will describe and evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives and the anticipated impacts of each. Public input into the planning process is essential.

The Plan will provide other agencies and the public with information to facilitate understanding of the desired conditions for the Refuge and how the Service will implement management strategies.

The Service will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in accordance with procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321–4370d).

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge covers approximately two million acres, roughly equivalent to the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. It occupies much of the Kenai Peninsula and is readily accessible from the city of Anchorage, which contains 41.5 percent of the state's population. The Kenai Refuge consists of the western slopes of the Kenai Mountains and forested lowlands bordering Cook Inlet. The Kenai Mountains, with their glaciers, rise to more than 6,500 feet. Treeless alpine and subalpine habitats are the home of mountain goats, Dall sheep, caribou, wolverine, marmots, and ptarmigan. Boreal forests extend to 1,800 feet above sea level and are composed of spruce and birch forests intermingled with hundreds of lakes. Boreal forests are home to moose, wolves, black and brown bears, lynx, snowshoe hares, and numerous species of neotropical birds such as olive-sided flycatchers, myrtle warblers, and ruby-crowned kinglets. At sea level, the Refuge encompasses the last remaining pristine major salt water estuary on the Kenai Peninsula: the Chickaloon River Flats. The flats provide a major migratory staging area and nesting habitat for thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl throughout the spring, summer, and fall. The flats are also used as a haul-out area by harbor seals, and thousands of salmon migrate up the Chickaloon River system each year to spawn.

The Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act of 1980 (Section 303[4]) sets forth the following major purposes for which the Kenai Refuge was established and is to be managed:

(i) To conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to,

moose, bear, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonoids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and nonmigratory birds;

(ii) To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;

(iii) To ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge;

(iv) To provide in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training; and

(v) To provide, in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation.

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was completed in 1985. It is being revised consistent with Section 304(g) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service planning policy.

Dated: November 7, 2003.

Rowan Gould,

Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Availability of a Final Supplement and Amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan—Recovery Criteria and Estimates of Time for Recovery Actions for the Sonoran Pronghorn

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability of a Final Supplement and Amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana sonoriensis*) Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan). In the U.S., the species is currently known to occur on Federal lands in Maricopa, Pima, and Yuma counties in southwestern Arizona. The Final Supplement and Amendment reassesses recovery criteria from the

Recovery Plan, relates recovery actions to the five listing factors of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and assigns a timeline to recovery actions.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to obtain a copy of the Final Supplement and Amendment may do so by accessing the Service's Arizona Ecological Service Field Office internet web page at Arizonaes.fws.gov or contacting John Morgart, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1611 North Second Avenue, Ajo, Arizona 85321 (520/387–4989 Direct; 520/387–6483 Refuge Office; 520/387–5359 Fax; john_morgart@fws.gov e-mail).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Morgart (see ADDRESSES).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Restoring an endangered or threatened animal or plant species to the point where it is again a secure, self-sustaining member of its ecosystem is a primary goal of the Service's endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, the Service prepares recovery plans for most of the listed species native to the United States. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for conservation of species, including criteria for downlisting or delisting, and time and cost estimates for implementing the recommended recovery measures.

In a recent court decision (Civil Action No. 99–927 (ESH)), the judge ruled that the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan “* * * fails to establish (1) objective measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the pronghorn may be removed from the list of endangered species or, if such criteria are not practicable, an explanation of that conclusion and (2) estimates of the time required to carry out those measures needed to achieve the plan's goal and to achieve intermediate steps toward that goal where practicable, or, if such estimates are not practicable, an explanation of that conclusion.” The Court ordered the Service to reconsider these portions of the Recovery Plan. The deadline for completion of this task was extended three times, with a final deadline of January 15, 2002.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. section 4(f) of the Act, as amended in 1988, requires that public notice and an opportunity for public review and

comment be provided during recovery plan development. On September 25, 2001, a 60-day public review and comment period for the Draft Supplement and Amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan was initiated. The Final Supplement and Amendment considers all information received during the public comment period. In addition, the Service and other Federal agencies will take these comments into account in the course of implementing recovery activities.

The Final Supplement and Amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan updates selected biological sections of the Recovery Plan, addresses the five listing factors mandated by section 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, reassesses recovery criteria presented in the Recovery Plan, and where practicable, provides estimates of time necessary to carry out measures needed to effect recovery of Sonoran pronghorn as articulated in the Recovery Plan. The Final Supplement and Amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Recovery Plan was developed by the Service in coordination with an appointed Recovery Team that includes a group of scientists and agency biologists with expertise in Sonoran pronghorn ecology. The Final Supplement and Amendment to the Recovery Plan has undergone peer review by scientists, conservation biologists, range experts, and others experienced in reviewing recovery plans, and incorporates their comments where applicable.

Authority: The authority for this action is Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: February 26, 2003.

David Yazzie,

Acting Regional Director.

Editorial Note: This document was received in the Office of the Federal Register on November 21, 2003.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for Issuance of an Incidental Take Permit Associated With a Habitat Conservation Plan for the San Diego County Water Authority, California

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, we, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) are advising the public that we intend to gather information necessary to prepare, in coordination with the San Diego County Water Authority (Authority), a joint programmatic Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) on the San Diego County Water Authority Subregional Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) proposed by the Authority for portions of San Diego and Riverside County, California. The HCP is being prepared under section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, (ESA); whereas the NCCP is being prepared under the State of California's Natural Community Conservation Planning Act.

The purpose of the EIR/EIS is to analyze the impacts of an incidental take permit which the Authority will request from the Service for 29 federally listed threatened or endangered species and 55 unlisted species, should they become listed under the ESA during the term of the permit. This analysis is needed under NEPA because the proposed Federal action of issuing an ESA permit may affect the human environment by authorizing take of listed species that could occur from development, operations, and maintenance activities over an approximately 2,034,787-acre planning area in roughly the coastal half of San Diego County and the extreme southwestern portion of Riverside County. The proposed NCCP/HCP would identify those actions necessary to maintain the viability of coastal sage scrub and other habitat types in the planning area.

We provide this notice to: (1) Advise other Federal and State agencies, affected Tribes, and the public of our intentions; (2) announce a public meeting and the initiation of a 30-day scoping period; and (3) obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to be included in the EIR/EIS. We invite written comments from interested parties to ensure that the full range of issues related to the permit request are identified.

DATES: The Service and the Authority will hold a joint public scoping meeting on December 11, 2003, from 10 a.m. until 12 noon. The Service will accept written comments at the meeting and for 30 days after the date of publication of this notice.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the San Diego County Water Authority Board Room, 4677 Overland Avenue, San Diego, California 92123. Comments should be sent to Mr. James Bartel, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92009; facsimile (760) 431-9624.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Sandra Marquez, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (*see ADDRESSES*), telephone (760) 431-9440 for general information; or if you have questions about the meeting, contact Tim Cass, Senior Water Resources Specialist, San Diego County Water Authority, telephone (858) 522-6758.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Availability of Documents

Background material may be obtained by contacting Tim Cass by phone (*see FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT*) or by letter sent to the San Diego County Water Authority, 4677 Overland Avenue, San Diego, California 92123.

Background

Federal agencies are required to conduct NEPA analyses of their proposed actions to determine if the actions may affect the human environment. The Service expects to make a decision on issuance of an ESA section 10(a)(1)(B) permit application expected to be submitted by the Authority. Therefore, the Service is seeking public input on the scope of the required NEPA analysis, including the range of reasonable alternatives and associated impacts of any alternatives.

Section 9 of the ESA and Federal regulations prohibit the "take" of animal species listed as endangered or threatened. Take is defined under the ESA as follows: to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, capture or collect listed wildlife, or to attempt to engage in such conduct (16 U.S.C. 1538). Harm includes habitat modification that kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Under limited circumstances, the Service may issue permits for take of listed species that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, otherwise lawful activities. Regulations governing permits for threatened and endangered species are found in 50 CFR 17.32 and 50 CFR 17.22.

If the Service decides to approve the NCCP/HCP, we would authorize incidental take of the California