

during normal business hours (8 to 4:30) at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin, Texas. Written data or comments concerning the application and EA/HCP should be submitted to the Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, Texas 78758 Austin, Texas. Please refer to permit number TE-068275-0 when submitting comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Clayton Napier, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, Texas 78758 (512/490-0057).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 9 of the Act prohibits the "taking" of endangered species such as the Houston toad. However, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), under limited circumstances, may issue permits to take endangered wildlife species incidental to, and not the purpose of, otherwise lawful activities. Regulations governing permits for endangered species are at 50 CFR 17.22.

The Service has prepared the Environmental Assessment/Habitat Conservation Plan (EA/HCP) for the incidental take application. A determination of jeopardy or non-jeopardy to the species and a decision pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will not be made until at least 60 days from the date of publication of this notice. This notice is provided pursuant to section 10(c) of the Act and NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1506.6).

Applicant: Ralph Smoot plans to construct Earth-sheltered condominiums, within 5 years, on a 2.5-acre property on Highway 71, Bastrop County, Texas. This action will eliminate 2.5 acres or less of Houston toad habitat and result in indirect impacts to the toad within the property. The Applicant proposes to compensate for the loss of Houston toad habitat by providing \$5,000.00 to the Houston Toad Conservation Fund at the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the specific purpose of land acquisition and management within Houston toad habitat.

Susan MacMullin,

Acting Regional Director, Region 2.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Availability of the Second Revision of the Recovery Plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*)

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability.

SUMMARY: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service, announce the availability of the second revision of the recovery plan for the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*). The original plan was approved in 1979 and the first revision was approved in 1985. The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker is endemic to mature pine woodlands of the Southeastern United States and currently occurs in 11 States (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas). Intensive research has greatly increased our understanding of the ecology of red-cockaded woodpeckers and has provided powerful management tools that have been highly successful in reversing the widespread declines of past decades. With appropriate management, the species can achieve full recovery. This second revision of the recovery plan describes in detail the ecology and management of red-cockaded woodpeckers, and outlines a mechanism to recover the species based on new insight into population and species viability.

ADDRESSES: Recovery plans that have been approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service are available on the Internet at <http://endangered.fws.gov/recovery/index.html>. Recovery plans may also be obtained from the Fish and Wildlife Reference Service, 5430 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 110, Bethesda, Maryland 20814, telephone 301/429-6403 or 800/582-3421. The fee for the plan varies depending on the number of pages of the plan. A limited supply of this revision to the red-cockaded woodpecker recovery plan is also available from Ralph Costa, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Forest Resources, 261 Lehotsky Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina 29634 (telephone 864/656-2432). Additionally, the plan is available on the Clemson Field Office Web site at <http://rcwrecovery.fws.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Ralph Costa at the above address and telephone number.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Restoring endangered or threatened animals or plants to the point where they are again secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is a primary goal of our endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, we are working to prepare recovery plans for most of the listed species native to the United States. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for conservation of the species, establish criteria for downlisting or delisting them, and estimate time and cost for implementing the recovery measures needed.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (Act), 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 requires that during recovery plan development, we provide public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment. This revision to the recovery plan was released for public comment on September 13, 2000 (65 FR 55269), and the comment period was reopened on November 21, 2002 (67 FR 70237). Information presented during the comment periods has been considered in the preparation of this revision.

The red-cockaded woodpecker was listed as an endangered species in 1970 (35 FR 16047). This taxon is endemic to open, mature and old-growth pine ecosystems in the Southeastern United States. Currently, there are an estimated 14,068 red-cockaded woodpeckers living in 5,627 known active clusters across 11 States. It is estimated that pre-European settlement there were 1 to 1.5 million groups of red-cockaded woodpeckers. Limiting factors for the red-cockaded woodpecker are those that directly affect the number of potential breeding groups, because this is the primary determinant of population size and trend. Multiple factors currently impact the persistence of breeding groups and, therefore, population and species viability. Foremost among these are the factors that limit suitable nesting habitat, namely fire suppression and lack of cavity trees. Another factor directly limiting the number of potential breeding groups is habitat fragmentation and consequent isolation of groups, which results in disrupted dispersal of helpers and failure to replace breeders. There are several other threats to the existence and recovery of the species, not limiting most populations currently, but which will become more important as the current limitations are addressed. Chief among these are the degradation