

through the mail were unsuccessful. In addition to those efforts, the required public notices were published in the local newspaper. We also issued a news release, and there was coverage in the local newspaper and in other news media. Consequently, we believe we satisfactorily met the requirements for public notice to interested parties.

(43) *Comment:* The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Department of Defense (DOD) submitted karst management plans for Government Canyon State Natural Area (GCSNA) and Camp Bullis, respectively, during the public comment period and requested that their properties be excluded from the final critical habitat designation.

Our Response: We reviewed the management plans submitted for both Camp Bullis and GCSNA. On the basis of our evaluation of these plans, we determined that they provide adequate special management and have not included the areas involved in the final designation of critical habitat. (See "Lands Covered Under Existing Conservation Plans" section for more information.)

Peer Review

In accordance with our peer review policy published on July 1, 1994 (59 FR 34270), we solicited independent opinions from knowledgeable individuals with expertise in one or several fields, including familiarity with the species, familiarity with the geographic region in which the species occurs, and familiarity with the principles of conservation biology. Only one of the eleven peer reviewers requested to review the proposed rule submitted comments. Overall the peer reviewer found the proposed rule to be an "excellent, comprehensive document." The following specific comments were provided by the peer reviewer.

(44) *Comment:* The 36 ha (90 ac) zone of vegetation surrounding each known cave or cave complex should be adequate to preserve foraging habitat for cave crickets.

Our Response: In this final rule we have significantly reduced the areas around occupied caves that are included in the critical habitat designation. However, in most cases, the critical habitat boundaries were drawn to include a 50 m (164 ft) area plus a buffer, and best available information indicates that most cave crickets forage within 50 m (164 ft) of cave entrances (see "Background" section for additional information).

(45) *Comment:* The reviewer stated that habitat requirements described in

the proposed rule seemed fine; however, the reviewer expressed concern that active management may be required to maintain natural surface habitat for the benefit of the subsurface environment. The reviewer also expressed concern about the encroachment of red imported fire ants and the impacts of predation on and competition with cave crickets and asked if there is a provision for dealing with this threat in the critical habitat units.

Our Response: We recognize the impact that fire ants likely have on listed karst invertebrates and the need for intense management to control this threat. The designation of critical habitat recognizes that these areas may need special management, however, the designation does not require any particular land management activities. Specific actions for management recommendations will likely be included in the future recovery plan for these species. We will work with landowners on a case-by-case basis to assist in land management provisions to protect the karst environment that supports the listed Bexar County invertebrates.

(46) *Comment:* There are no dispersal corridors between these habitat units to provide opportunities for movement of individuals between cave cricket populations.

Our Response: We know that dispersal corridors are likely important for the long-term maintenance of cave cricket populations (see Background section for discussion). However, we lack the necessary information to adequately quantify the specific locations of such corridors and therefore have not included them in this critical habitat designation.

(47) *Comment:* The commenter recommends deleting the reference in the "Background" section to a study concerning *Ceuthophilus gracilipes*, another species of cave crickets, because it is not appropriate in the context in which it was used.

Our Response: We deleted this reference, which had been included in our proposed designation, and updated the "Background" section of this final rule as suggested.

Summary of Changes From the Proposed Rule

On the basis of public comments, we reviewed our methodology for determining the extent of critical habitat designation for the Bexar County karst invertebrates. Consequently, we refined the boundaries of our original proposed critical habitat units for this final designation and clarified our description of the methodology and

rationale used in defining the critical habitat boundaries. Overall, these changes resulted in designating 431 ha (1,063 ac) in 22 units as critical habitat, as compared to our proposed designation of 3,857 ha (9,516 ac) in 25 units. Table 2 provides a unit-by-unit list of the changes in this final rule, which are summarized below.

In the proposed rule, we delineated critical habitat boundaries on the basis of the following criteria: Known occupied caves; the cave footprint; surface/subsurface drainage areas associated with the occupied cave; the cave cricket foraging area plus a buffer; the contiguous karst deposit associated with the occupied cave; and a minimum of 36 ha (90 ac), where possible, to support dominant, subdominant, and rare plant species. In the final rule, we revised several of these criteria. We reduced the minimum area needed to support surface vegetation from 36 ha (90 ac) to 16 ha (40 ac), which is the minimum area we determined is needed to support 15 of the 24 plant species common to the Edwards Plateau, including the 7 species with the highest dominance values, as listed in Van Auken *et al.* (1980). We did not include an estimated area to support nine of the rarer plant species in our consideration of this minimum area, because of a lack of definitive information on the importance of such species to the functioning of the karst ecosystem. These nine species all have importance values of less than 1.0 and needed an area of approximately 20 to 80 ha (49 to 198 ac) to maintain their populations. We also reduced the criterion for the amount of contiguous karst deposit surrounding occupied caves. In the proposed rule, we delineated the unit boundaries to maximize the amount of contiguous karst deposit we estimated was necessary to provide for subsurface movement of listed species between and around occupied caves. However, because of lack of data allowing us to quantify the extent of subsurface karst needed to maintain populations of these species, in the final rule we delineated the boundaries to maximize the amount of subsurface karst deposit underlying the cave footprint, drainage areas, cave cricket foraging area plus buffer, and 16 ha (40 ac) vegetation area only. As a result of these revisions, the size of most units was reduced significantly (Table 2). (See "Criteria Used to Designate Critical Habitat" section for additional details.)

In addition to the changes in criteria, we also completely removed six units that had been proposed for designation (Units 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 10, and 11) from the final designation. Units 1a–1d were