

necessary for their survival and to ensure that any incidental take of listed species will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of those species.

The purpose of the scoping meeting to be held on October 4, 2003, at 10:00 a.m. at the offices of Pima County Public Works, Room C in the Basement, 201 North Stone Avenue, Tucson, Arizona is to brief the public on the background of the Pima County MSCP, alternative proposals under consideration for the draft EIS, and the Fish and Wildlife Service's role and steps that we will take to develop the draft EIS for this habitat conservation planning effort. At the scoping meeting, there will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions, to provide oral comments and also to provide written comments. Written comments may also be sent to the Fish and Wildlife Service by mail (see ADDRESSES section above).

Activities proposed for coverage under the incidental take permit include lawful activities that would occur consistent with the Pima County MSCP conservation guidelines and include, but are not limited to, maintenance of county operations, implementation of capital improvement projects, and issuance of land-use related permits, including those for residential and commercial development.

Pima County is expected to apply for an incidental take permit for 55 vulnerable species that would be protected within their Conservation Lands System map. The 55 species include the following federally listed species: the lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuena*), cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum cactorum*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii eximius*), Chiricahua leopard frog (*Rana Chiricahuensis*), desert pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*), Gila topminnow (*Poeciliopsis occidentalis occidentalis*), Huachuca water umbel (*Lilaeopsis schaffneriana* var. *recurva*), Nichol Turk's head cactus (*Echinocactus horizontalis* var. *nicholli*), and Pima pineapple cactus (*Coryphantha scheeri* var. *robustispina*). In addition, Pima County will seek to address and cover the Gila chub (*Gila intermedia*), a species proposed for listing, and the Acuna cactus (*Echinomastus erectocentrus* var. *acunensis*) and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus* spp. *Occidentalis*), both of which are candidates for listing. Pima County is also seeking to address and cover at least 43 other rare and/or sensitive species that occur in the County. Unlisted species that are

considered as if they were listed, and that the Service finds are adequately conserved by the Pima County MSCP, will be automatically permitted for incidental take should they be listed as federally threatened or endangered species in the future. Numerous other listed and sensitive species for which Pima County is not seeking permit coverage will also benefit from the conservation measures provided in the Pima County MSCP through protection of similar or overlapping habitat conditions and ecosystem functions.

Alternatives

The proposed action and alternatives that will be developed in the EIS will be assessed against the No Action/No Project alternative, which assumes that some or all of the current and future projects proposed in Pima County would be implemented individually, one at a time, and be in compliance with the Act. The No Action/No Project alternative implies that the impacts from these potential projects on sensitive species and habitats would be evaluated and mitigated on a project-by-project basis, as is currently the case. For any activities involving take of listed species due to non-federal projects/actions, individual Section 10(a)(1)(B) permits would be required. Without a coordinated, comprehensive ecosystem-based conservation approach for the region, listed species may not be adequately addressed by individual project-specific mitigation requirements, unlisted candidate and sensitive species would not receive proactive action intended to preclude the need to list them in the future, and project-specific mitigation would be piecemeal and less cost effective in helping Federal and non-federal agencies work toward recovery of listed species. Current independent conservation actions would continue, although some of these are not yet funded.

Other alternatives that may be considered in the EIS include issuance of an incidental take permit for only the 9 currently listed species, plus those species that would be adequately addressed by the conservation measures enacted for those 9 species; issuance of an incidental take permit for an undetermined number of listed and unlisted species within the 55 identified vulnerable species; and issuance of an incidental take permit for the species within the 55 identified vulnerable species that are currently listed as threatened and endangered or are candidates or proposed for listing. In addition, alternatives may consider varying levels of take anticipated and amount and location of mitigation.

Environmental Review

The primary issue to be addressed during the scoping and planning process for the MSCP and EIS is how to resolve potential conflicts between development or land management practices and listed and sensitive species in Pima County. We have identified a preliminary list of probable environmental issues and effects associated with the proposed action. Other issues may be identified during the development of the Pima County MSCP and through the public scoping process. Until a firm proposal and alternatives with specific actions and locations are developed, it is difficult to predict more specific impacts. The preliminary list is as follows:

Urban land uses, including residential, commercial, and industrial development. Transportation, Water resources, including watershed function and water quality. Agriculture, air resources, cultural and historic resources, recreation. Ranching practices and livestock grazing, mineral resources, utility rights-of-way, fire Management, social and economic resources, environmental justice

We will conduct an environmental review that analyzes the proposed action, as well as a range of reasonable alternatives and the associated impacts of each. The EIS will be the basis for the Service's evaluation of impacts to the species and the range of alternatives to be addressed. The EIS is expected to provide biological descriptions of the affected species and habitats and an analysis of the socioeconomic effects of the proposed action.

This notice is being furnished in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7. Comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties to ensure that a range of issues and alternatives related to the proposed action are identified. The review of this project will be conducted according to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), National Environmental Policy Act Regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), other appropriate Federal laws, regulations, policies, and guidance, and Service procedures for compliance with those regulations.

After the environmental review is complete, we will publish a notice of availability and a request for comment on the draft EIS and Pima County's permit application, which will include the Pima County MSCP.