

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