

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release



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SERVICE RELEASES DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS FOR PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF CRITICAL HABITAT FOR THE MARBLED MURRELET

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft analysis estimating the potential costs related to the conservation of areas proposed for marbled murrelet critical habitat at \$69.4 million to \$1.4 billion over the next 20 years. In releasing the analysis, the Service reopened the public comment period on its September 2006 proposal to designate critical habitat for the species. The 30-day public comment period opens today.

The Service is proposing to designate 221,692 acres of critical habitat for the marbled murrelet, a threatened species protected under the Endangered Species Act. Areas proposed for critical habitat include portions of California, Oregon and Washington.

The draft economic analysis addresses the impacts of conservation efforts for the species on activities occurring on lands proposed for critical habitat designation, as well as those on lands proposed for exclusion from the critical habitat designation. The analysis measures lost economic value associated with 1) timber management, 2) development, 3) recreation, 4) other land use activities including transportation and mining, and 5) administrative costs associated with Endangered Species Act section 7 consultations, many of which are already occurring due to the listing of the marbled murrelet. The \$69.4 million figure represents an estimate of potential costs associated with all ongoing conservation activities for the marbled murrelet. The \$1.4 billion estimate assumes that all timber harvest and development within the proposed critical habitat would be precluded and is considered highly unlikely based on past consultations.

For the areas proposed for exclusion, the draft economic analysis estimates potential costs related to marbled murrelet conservation could total \$1.2 billion, in current dollars, over the next 20 years if those areas were to be included in the final critical habitat designation.

The marbled murrelet is a small seabird that spends most of its time in the marine environment and nests in forests along the Pacific Coast. The Service's 2006 critical habitat proposal identifies 3,590,642 acres in Oregon, Washington and California as critical habitat but proposes to exclude 3,368,950 acres already protected under other existing regulations or plans, such as the Northwest Forest Plan, state and tribal management plans and habitat conservation plans. An additional 1,574,201 acres were considered but not included in the proposal because they already are managed in ways that meet the needs of the marbled murrelet. These include federal wilderness areas, tribal conservation easements and Redwood state and national parks.

If the proposed exclusions are finalized, the final critical habitat designation will include 112,037 acres in California, 82,747 acres in Oregon and 26,908 acres in Washington. After the exclusions, approximately 1 percent of the proposed area is federal land, 80 percent is city, county or state land, and 19 percent is private land. These are areas not covered by a management plan that provides protection to the marbled murrelet and its habitat.

The critical habitat proposal would revise a 1996 critical habitat designation for the marbled murrelet that included nearly 3.9 million acres. The proposal designates only those areas of suitable habitat known to be occupied by marbled murrelets and to contain features essential to the species' survival. Consistent with the 1996 designation, no marine areas are being proposed for designation, because they do not require special management.

Critical habitat identifies specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. However, federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The notice of availability of the draft economic analysis was published in today's *Federal Register*. The complete report and proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the marbled murrelet are available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/westwafwo/> or by request to the Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office Manager. The draft economic analysis was prepared by Industrial Economics Incorporated of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received within the 30-day comment period which opened June 26, 2007. Comments previously submitted need not be resubmitted as they are already part of the public record and will be fully considered in preparation of the final rule. Written comments and information may be submitted by mail to Ken Berg, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE., Suite 101,

Lacey, WA 98503-1273; hand-delivered to our Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office at the address given above; faxed to 360-753-9405; or sent by electronic mail (e-mail) to *MurreletCH@fws.gov*. For directions on how to submit e-mail comments, see the Public Comments Solicited section in the Notice of Availability. Written comments also may be submitted via the Federal Rulemaking Portal: *http://www.regulations.gov*. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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