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**ASSISTANT SECRETARY MANSON ANNOUNCES REVISED
REGULATIONS FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES
CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS ON PRIVATE LANDS**

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Craig Manson today announced revised regulations that will encourage private landowners to undertake voluntary conservation measures on their property to benefit threatened, endangered and at-risk species.

The new regulations will improve the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Safe Harbor and Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances policies by providing clearer definitions and more certainty to property owners, Manson said.

"Both Safe Harbors and CCAAs have proven to be powerful tools to promote conservation and recovery of imperiled species," Manson said. "The revised regulations we are issuing today will encourage more landowners to participate in this voluntary conservation by spelling out more clearly the terms and conditions of the agreements."

"Safe Harbor agreements have been a very effective way of enlisting the cooperation of private landowners in conserving endangered species," said Michael J. Bean of Environmental Defense, an organization that helped develop the first such agreements nearly a decade ago. "These changes should facilitate the even broader use of this creative new conservation approach by farmers, ranchers and forest landowners."

Under a Safe Harbor agreement, private landowners agree to take actions on their property to benefit species that are listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. In return, they receive assurances that their conservation measures will not lead to further restrictions on the use of the land if they lead to an increase in the population of the species on the property.

CCAAs are similar agreements except that they apply to species that are either proposed for listing under the Act or are on the candidate list. In these cases, the landowners get assurances that their conservation actions, if successful, will not lead to further restrictions under the Act if the species is listed in the future.

There are now 23 Safe Harbor permits covering 29 listed species and involving more than 130 landowners. More than 50 additional Safe Harbor Agreements are under development. Seven CCAAs are in effect, covering 21 species. More than 25 additional CCAAs are under development.

The revised regulations will make such agreements easier to understand and implement by eliminating inconsistencies between the policies and the regulations used to implement them. In addition, experience gained since the policies and regulations were adopted in 1999 has shown the need to clarify ambiguities in the regulations that have been causing confusion for landowners.

For example, the rule also clarifies the process for obtaining authorization to transfer a permit issued in association with the agreements. In addition, the rule clarifies the efforts the Service will make to avoid the need to revoke a permit.

The rule more explicitly provides landowners with greater certainty that such agreements will be altered only if continuing an authorized activity may jeopardize the existence of the protected species. The rule also ensures that traditional agricultural uses can continue alongside habitat improvements.

“More than half of threatened and endangered species depend on private lands for habitat, and if we are going to recover many of these species, we must work hand in hand with landowners to restore their habitat,” Manson said.

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 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource 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 governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.