



News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Fish and Wildlife Service to Hold Public Meeting to Identify Issues Related to Proposed Seabird Permit

A public scoping meeting to gather information relating to the environmental review of a habitat conservation plan being prepared for three rare seabird species will be held on Kauai on Wednesday, January 23, in Lihue. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will seek public comment regarding whether an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement should be prepared and which alternatives should be evaluated. The habitat conservation plan is being prepared by the Kauai Island Utility Cooperative as part of their application for an incidental take permit for the continued operation and maintenance of their existing facilities and construction, operation and maintenance of certain future facilities.

The meeting will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Planning Commission Conference Room, Moikeha Building, located at 4444 Rice Street in Lihue. "The purpose of the meeting is to allow interested parties the opportunity to identify potentially significant issues and ensure that a reasonable range of alternatives is addressed," said Jeff Newman, assistant field supervisor for the Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

Since 2002, KIUC has been working with the Service and the State of Hawaii to develop a draft habitat conservation plan or HCP and also to simultaneously implement certain interim conservation measures to benefit three seabird species. On September 16, 2004, the Service conducted the first public scoping meeting concerning the proposed HCP, but because of the length of time that has passed without the plan being completed; the Service is holding an additional meeting to ensure full public participation.

The Endangered Species Act contains provisions for issuing incidental take permits to nonfederal entities. Any proposed take must be incidental to otherwise lawful activities and cannot appreciably reduce the likelihood of survival and recovery of the species in the wild. The impacts of such take must also be minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable.

To obtain an incidental take permit, an applicant must prepare an HCP describing the impact that will likely result from the proposed taking, the measures for minimizing and mitigating the take, the funding available to implement such measures, alternatives to the taking, and the reason why such alternatives are not being implemented.

"Take" is defined under the Endangered Species Act as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect listed animal species, or attempt to engage in such contact. Harm includes significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures listed wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, and sheltering.

Three seabird species are expected to be covered under the joint federal/state HCP: the endangered Hawaiian petrel, threatened Newell's shearwater, and the band-rumped storm-petrel, a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Species may be added or deleted during the

course of the HCP development based on further analyses, new information, agency consultation, and public comment.

These seabird species breed on Kauai, but spend a large part of the year at sea. They nest in colonies in the interior mountains of Kauai beginning in March and April and ending at the beginning of September when the fledglings depart for the sea. Both adults and fledglings are known to collide with tall buildings, towers, powerlines, and other structures while flying at night between their nesting colonies and ocean foraging areas. These birds, especially the young fledglings, are also attracted to bright lights, and disoriented birds are commonly observed circling repeatedly around exterior light sources until they fall exhausted to the ground or collide with structures.

The proposed HCP will cover KIUC activities within all areas on Kauai where its facilities are located, including operation, maintenance, and repair of these and other existing facilities, and construction, operation, maintenance, and repair of certain new facilities, during the term of the incidental take permit. Under the HCP, the effects of covered activities associated with KIUC facilities and operations are expected to be minimized and mitigated through a detailed conservation program.

The biological goals of the HCP are to avoid and minimize incidental take of listed seabirds associated with implementing covered activities and to mitigate any unavoidable incidental take by improving seabird survival and breeding success. The HCP will minimize the impacts through a variety of measures such as shielding lights and installing powerline marker balls and other bird diverters. Certain design features will also be implemented to reduce the risk of seabird collisions such as installing powerlines below seabird flight altitudes, modifying powerline arrays, and potentially placing certain powerline segments underground. The conservation program will also include efforts to rescue and rehabilitate birds grounded by collisions or light-attraction effects, monitor trends in the number and locations of downed seabirds, conduct research to provide more options for minimizing or mitigating incidental take, and implement management actions, such as predator and invasive species control, within an active seabird colony.

The Service is requesting written comments regarding the proposed action from interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. Respondents should address potential environmental issues, applicable mitigation, and reasonable alternatives they feel could be included in the environmental analysis. Written comments should be addressed to Jeff Newman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850, or faxed to 808/792-9580 or e-mail to jeff_newman@fws.gov. All written comments must be postmarked by February 8, 2008.

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 97-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.