

available for review, *subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act*, by any party who submits a written request for a copy of such documents to the following office within 30 days of the date of publication of this notice: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Management Authority, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 700, Arlington, Virginia 22203. Phone: (703/358-2104); FAX: (703/358-2281).

Dated: August 13, 1999.

Pam Hall,

Acting Chief, Branch of Permits, Office of Management Authority.

[FR Doc. 99-21473 Filed 8-18-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Migratory Bird Permits; Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on Resident Canada Goose Management

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) is issuing this notice to advise the public that we are initiating efforts to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for resident Canada goose management under the authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The EIS will consider a range of management alternatives for addressing expanding populations of locally-breeding Canada geese that are increasingly posing threats to health and human safety and injuring personal and public property. This notice describes possible alternatives, invites public participation in the scoping process for preparing the EIS, and identifies the Service official to whom you may direct questions and comments. While we have yet to determine potential sites of public scoping meetings, we will publish a notice of any such public meetings with the locations, dates, and times in the **Federal Register**.

DATES: You must submit written comments regarding EIS scoping by October 18, 1999, to the address below.

ADDRESSES: You should send written comments to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, ms 634—ARLSQ, 1849 C Street NW., Washington, D.C. 20240. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the public record. You may inspect

comments during normal business hours in room 634—Arlington Square Building, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Jonathan Andrew, Chief, or Ron W. Kokel, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (703) 358-1714.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Numbers of Canada geese that nest and reside predominantly within the conterminous United States have increased exponentially in recent years. These geese are usually referred to as "resident" Canada geese. Recent surveys in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways suggest that the resident breeding population now exceeds 1 million individuals in both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways is increasing dramatically. Because resident Canada geese live in temperate climates with relatively stable breeding habitat conditions and low numbers of predators, tolerate human and other disturbances, have a relative abundance of preferred habitat provided by current urban/suburban landscaping techniques, and fly relatively short distances to winter compared with other Canada goose populations, they exhibit a consistently high annual production and survival. Given these characteristics, the absence of waterfowl hunting in many of these areas, and free food handouts by some people, these urban/suburban resident Canada goose populations are increasingly coming into conflict with human activities in many parts of the country.

Conflicts between geese and people affect or damage several types of resources, including property, human health and safety, agriculture, and natural resources. Common problem areas include public parks, airports, public beaches and swimming facilities, water-treatment reservoirs, corporate business areas, golf courses, schools, college campuses, private lawns, amusement parks, cemeteries, hospitals, residential subdivisions, and along or between highways.

Property damage usually involves landscaping and walkways, most commonly on golf courses and waterfront property. In parks and other open areas near water, large goose flocks create local problems with their abundant droppings and feather litter (Conover and Chasko, 1985). Surveys have found that while most landowners like seeing some geese on their property, eventually, increasing numbers of geese and the associated accumulation of

goose droppings on lawns cause many landowners to view geese as a nuisance and thus reduce both the aesthetic value and recreational use of these areas (Conover and Chasko, 1985).

Negative impacts on human health and safety occur in several ways. At airports, large numbers of geese can create a very serious threat to aviation. Resident Canada geese have been involved in a large number of aircraft strikes resulting in dangerous landing/take-off conditions and costly repairs. As a result, many airports have active goose control programs. Excessive goose droppings are a disease concern for many people. Public beaches in several States have been closed due to excessive fecal coliform levels that in some cases have been traced back to geese and other waterfowl. Additionally, during nesting and brood rearing, aggressive geese have bitten and chased people.

Agricultural and natural resource impacts include losses to grain crops, overgrazing of pastures, and degrading water quality. Goose droppings in heavy concentrations can overfertilize lawns and degrade water quality resulting in eutrophication of lakes with excessive algae growth (Manny *et al.*, 1994). Overall, complaints related to personal and public property damage, agricultural damage and other public conflicts are increasing as resident Canada goose populations increase.

Until recently, we attempted to address this growing problem through existing annual hunting season frameworks and the issuance of control permits on a case-by-case basis. While this approach provided relief in some areas, it did not completely address the problem. On June 17, we published a final rule in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 32766) establishing a new special Canada goose permit. The new permits are specifically for the management and control of resident Canada geese. We will issue permits to State conservation or wildlife management agencies on a State-specific basis, so States and their designated agents can initiate resident goose damage management and control injury problems within the conditions and restrictions of the permit program. The permits, while restricted to the period between March 11 and August 31, increase the use and availability of control measures, decrease the number of injurious resident Canada geese in localized areas, have little impact on hunting or other recreation dependent on the availability of resident Canada geese, and allow injury/damage problems to be dealt with on the State and local level, thereby resulting in more responsive and timely control activities. The new special permits

further result in biologically sound and more cost-effective and efficient resident Canada goose damage management. Overall, the new permit will provide some additional management flexibility needed to address this serious problem and at the same time simplify the procedures needed to administer this program. In the short term, we believe this permit will satisfy the need for an efficient/cost-effective program while allowing us to maintain management control.

In the long-term, however, we realize that more management flexibility will likely be necessary. Because of the unique locations where large numbers of these geese nest, feed, and reside, we continue to believe that new and innovative approaches and strategies for dealing with bird/human conflicts will be needed. We have recently begun the initial work, with the full assistance and cooperation of the Flyway Councils and the Wildlife Services program of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS/WS), to develop a long-term strategy to integrate our management of these birds into a larger Flyway management plan system. In order to properly examine alternative strategies to control and manage resident Canada geese that either pose a threat to health and human safety or cause damage to personal and public property, the preparation of an EIS is necessary.

Resident Canada Goose Populations

Canada geese, like other geese, are long-lived birds with relatively low reproduction rates and high survival rates. However, of all the Canada goose subspecies, the subspecies comprising most resident geese have a higher reproductive and adult survival rate. While arctic and subarctic Canada goose survival and reproduction are greatly influenced by weather conditions, resident geese live in more temperate climates with relatively stable breeding habitat conditions and low numbers of predators. Additionally, nesting resident geese are very tolerant of human disturbance and willing to nest in close proximity to other geese (Gosser and Conover, 1999; Zenner and LaGrange, 1998). Urban and suburban landscaping in the conterminous United States offers resident geese a relative abundance of preferred habitat (park-like open areas with short grass adjacent to small bodies of water). Also, resident geese fly relatively short distances to winter compared with other Canada goose populations. All of these factors result in consistently high annual reproduction and survival for the resident Canada goose population.

In recent years, the numbers of Canada geese that nest predominantly within the conterminous United States have increased tremendously. Recent surveys in the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Central Flyways (Wood *et al.*, 1994; Kelley *et al.*, 1998; Nelson and Oetting, 1998; Sheaffer and Malecki, 1998; Wilkins and Cooch, 1999) suggest that the resident breeding population now exceeds 1 million individuals in both the Atlantic (17 States) and Mississippi (14 States) Flyways. Available information shows that in the Atlantic Flyway, the resident population has increased an average of 14 percent per year since 1989. In the Mississippi Flyway, the resident population of Canada geese has increased at a rate of about 6 percent per year during the last 10 years. In the Central and Pacific Flyways, populations of resident Canada geese have similarly increased over the last few years. For example, in the Puget Sound area of Washington, a 10-year trend shows an increase from 3,110 geese in 1988 to 13,512 geese in 1997, an increase of 434%. We remain concerned about the rapid growth rate exhibited by these already large populations.

Current Management Actions

To date, we have tried to address injurious resident Canada goose problems through existing hunting seasons, the creation of new special Canada goose seasons designed to target resident populations, the issuance of depredation permits allowing specific control activities, and the creation of a new special Canada goose permit.

(1) Special Hunting Seasons

Special Canada goose seasons are hunting seasons specifically designed to target resident populations through either time or area restrictions. We first initiated special seasons targeting resident Canada geese in 1977 in the Mississippi Flyway with an experimental late season in Michigan. The original intent of these special seasons was to provide additional harvest opportunities on resident Canada geese while minimizing impacts to migrant geese. Initially, we considered all such seasons experimental, pending a thorough review of the data gathered by the participating State. We presently offer special seasons targeting resident Canada geese in all four Flyways, with 31 States participating. They are most popular among States when regular Canada goose seasons are restricted to protect migrant populations of Canada geese.

Harvest of Canada geese during these special seasons has increased substantially over the last 10 years. In the Atlantic Flyway, 16 of 17 States hold special Canada goose seasons, with harvest rising from about 2,300 in 1988 to over 272,000 in 1998. In the Mississippi Flyway, 11 of 14 States hold special Canada goose seasons, and harvest has increased from slightly more than 1,000 in 1981 to over 275,000 in 1998. Both Minnesota and Michigan currently harvest in excess of 70,000 locally-breeding Canada geese per year. While the harvest opportunities are not as significant in the Central and Pacific Flyways, as areas and seasons have expanded, harvest has increased from approximately 1,300 in 1989 to almost 40,000 in 1998. Putting these harvest numbers in perspective, Martin and Padding (1999) estimated that hunters harvested a total of 2,038,700 Canada geese last year in the U.S. Thus, conservatively, resident Canada geese now comprise roughly 30% of the total Canada goose harvest in the U.S. (587,000 of 2,038,700). However, despite these dramatic increases in harvest over the last 10 years, from less than 24,000 in 1988 to over 587,000 last year (a 24-fold increase), populations continue to increase in all Flyways.

Creation of these special harvest opportunities has helped to limit the problems and conflicts between geese and people in some areas. However, many resident Canada geese remain in urban and suburban areas throughout the fall and winter where these areas afford them almost complete protection from sport harvest. Thus, while the creation of these special hunting seasons is our first management tool of choice for dealing with most resident Canada goose conflicts, we realized that harvest management will never completely address this growing problem and permits to conduct otherwise prohibited control activities will continue to be necessary to balance human needs with expanding resident Canada goose populations.

(2) Depredation Permits

Complex Federal and State responsibilities are involved with all migratory bird control activities, including the control of resident Canada geese. All State and private control activities require a Federal migratory bird permit. These permits are issued in coordination with APHIS/WS. APHIS/WS is the Federal Agency with lead responsibility for dealing with wildlife damage complaints. In some instances, APHIS/WS may do the goose damage management work directly or they may

serve as agents working under authority of private and/or State permits.

However, APHIS/WS has limited personnel and resources to respond to requests for assistance. Likewise, as the number of complaints and conflicts continue to increase, the public will place greater demand on us and the States to assist in goose public-health and damage-management programs. This increased need for assistance places greater demand on the current permit-issuance system. Unfortunately, administrative procedures involved in the issuance of permits many times cause a lag time of several weeks between our receipt of a permit request, our evaluation and decision on issuing the permit, and the ultimate issuance of a site-specific permit authorizing a control action. In the interim, even small numbers of geese can cause significant damage to personal property and result in economic, recreational, and aesthetic losses. Thus, with the increase in complaints, the case-by-case permit issuance system can be time-consuming, cumbersome and inefficient for us and the States.

A brief summary of the complaints/requests for control permits placed with APHIS/WS indicates the increasing number of public conflicts. In 1997, APHIS/WS received 3,295 complaints of injurious Canada goose activity (APHIS/WS, 1998). In response to those complaints, APHIS/WS recommended we issue 354 permits. The vast majority of these complaints concerned agricultural, human health and safety, and property issues and came primarily from the Northeastern/New England area (50%) and the Upper Midwest/Great Lakes area (29%). Comparing these figures with previous years' data shows a steady increase in complaints since 1991. In 1991 APHIS/WS received 1,698 complaints of injurious Canada goose activity (APHIS/WS, 1992). In response to those complaints, APHIS/WS recommended we issue 92 permits.

Thus, our permit issuance has increased tremendously in recent years. For example, Region 5 (the Northeastern/New England area) issued 26 site-specific permits to kill resident Canada geese and 54 permits to addle eggs in 1994. Two years later in 1996, Region 5 issued 70 site-specific permits to kill resident Canada geese, 1 permit to relocate geese, and 151 permits to addle eggs. In addition, the Region issued Statewide permits to relocate birds and addle eggs to agencies in certain States. Over 3 years, these permits resulted in the relocation of over 2,600 geese, the addling of eggs in over 2,300 nests, and the take of over 1,000 birds.

In Region 3, the Upper Midwest/Great Lakes area, in 1994, the Region issued 149 permits authorizing resident Canada goose control activities, including trapping and relocation, destruction of nests/eggs, and take of adults. In 1998, Region 3 issued 225 permits authorizing resident Canada goose control activities. In total over the last 5 years, Region 3 permit holders, including APHIS/WS, airports, and state wildlife agencies, reported taking in excess of 27,000 eggs and 6,800 geese, and trapped and relocated over 70,000 resident Canada geese (complete reports through 1997, partial reports for 1998). States in which control activities were conducted included Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Since 1995, Region 3 has also issued permits to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources authorizing the capture and processing of resident Canada geese as food for local food-shelf programs. Minnesota's permit was a part of their Urban Goose Management Program for the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area (initiated in 1982). In 1995, the first year under these permits, Michigan and Minnesota were authorized to take up to 2,000 and 325 geese, respectively. Michigan reported taking 24 birds with Minnesota taking its full allotment of 325 birds. Since then, Minnesota has been authorized to annually take up to 2,500 resident Canada geese for its food-shelf program. In the three years under the program since 1995, Minnesota has reported taking 5,399 birds. Likewise, Michigan was also issued permits for 1996-1998 authorizing the take up to 1,000 resident Canada geese for its food-shelf programs. Michigan subsequently reported taking 490 birds in 1996 and 952 birds in 1997, before vacating their 1998 permit.

In Region 1, the Pacific Northwest/West Coast area, we have primarily limited permits for the control of resident Canada geese to the addling of eggs. In 1995, the Region issued permits authorizing the take of 900 eggs in the Puget Sound Area of Washington. In 1996, this number was increased to 2,000 eggs and 200 adult birds. APHIS/WS subsequently reported taking 911 and 1,570 eggs in 1995 and 1996, respectively, and 6 geese in 1996.

(3) *Special Canada goose permits*

On June 17, we published in the **Federal Register** (64 FR 32766) a final rule establishing a new special Canada goose permit. Designed specifically for the management and control of resident Canada geese, the new permits are only

available to State conservation or wildlife management agencies on a State-specific basis. Under the permits, States and their designated agents can initiate resident goose damage management and control injury problems within the conditions and restrictions of the permit program. The permits, while restricted to the period between March 11 and August 31, increase the use and availability of control measures, decrease the number of injurious resident Canada geese in localized areas, have little impact on hunting or other recreation dependent on the availability of resident Canada geese, and allow injury/damage problems to be dealt with on the State and local level, thereby resulting in more responsive and timely control activities. State applications for the special permits require several detailed statements regarding the size of the resident Canada goose breeding population in the State and the number of resident Canada geese, including eggs and nests, to be taken. In addition, the State must show that such damage-control actions will either provide for human health and safety or protect personal property, or compelling justification that the permit is needed to allow resolution of other conflicts between people and resident Canada geese. Briefly, some of the more pertinent restrictions in the new permits are:

1. State wildlife agencies (States) may take injurious resident Canada geese as a management tool but should utilize non-lethal management tools to the extent they consider appropriate in an effort to minimize lethal take.

2. Control activities should not adversely affect other migratory birds or any species designated under the Endangered Species Act as threatened or endangered.

3. States may conduct control activities March 11 through August 31 and should make a concerted effort to limit the take of adult birds to June, July, and August in order to minimize the potential impact on other migrant populations.

4. States must conduct control activities clearly as such (e.g., they cannot be set up to provide a hunting opportunity).

5. States must properly dispose of or utilize Canada geese killed in control programs. States may donate Canada geese killed under these permits to public museums or public scientific and educational institutions for exhibition, scientific, or educational purposes, or charities for human consumption. States may also bury or incinerate geese. States may not allow for Canada geese taken under these permits, nor their plumage, to be sold, offered for sale, bartered, or shipped for purpose of sale or barter.

6. States may use their own discretion for methods of take but utilized methods should

be consistent with accepted wildlife-damage management programs.

7. States may designate agents who must operate under the conditions of the State's permit.

8. States must keep records of all activities, including those of designated agents, carried out under the special permits. We will require an annual report detailing activities conducted under a permit.

9. We will annually review States' reports and will periodically assess the overall impact of this program to ensure compatibility with the long-term conservation of this resource.

10. We reserve the authority to immediately suspend or revoke any permit if we find that the State has not adhered to the terms and conditions specified in 50 CFR 13.27 and 13.28 or if we determine that the State's population of resident Canada geese no longer poses a threat to human health or safety, to personal property, or of injury to other interests.

Before establishing the special Canada goose permit, we conducted an analysis of the environmental effects and a lengthy public involvement process. The process began with a September 3, 1996, notice of availability of a "Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) on Permits for Control of Injurious Canada Geese and Request for Comments on Potential Regulations", we published in the **Federal Register** (61 FR 46431). The notice advised the public that we had prepared a DEA and announced our intent to consider regulatory changes to the process for issuance of permits to control injurious resident Canada geese. We subsequently extended the public comment period on November 12, 1996 (61 FR 58084). As a result of this invitation for public comment, we received 101 comments including two from Federal agencies, 28 from State wildlife agencies, 24 from private organizations and 47 from private citizens. After consideration of the comments, we revised our DEA.

On March 31, 1998, we published in the **Federal Register** (63 FR 15698) a proposal to establish a Canada goose damage management program (*i.e.*, Special Canada Goose Permit). In response to our proposed rule, we received 465 comments from Federal, State and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. In addition, we received several petitions containing 1,674 signatures. Based on review and evaluation of comments by the public and information contained in the Environmental Assessment, we revised the final rule and determined that the action to establish a special Canada goose permit program for the control and management of resident Canada geese would not be a major Federal action that would significantly affect the

quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, we made a Finding of No Significant Impact on this action and determined that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement was not required. The EA and Finding of No Significant Impact are available to the public at the location indicated under the ADDRESSES caption.

We believe the new special permits established by the June 17 rule further results in biologically sound and more cost-effective and efficient resident Canada goose damage management. Overall, the new permit will provide some additional management flexibility needed to address this serious problem and at the same time simplify the procedures needed to administer this program. In the short term, we believe this permit will satisfy the need for an efficient/cost-effective program while allowing us to maintain management control. To date, several States have applied for the new permits.

Alternatives

We are considering the following alternatives. After the scoping process, we will develop the alternatives to be included in the EIS and base them on the mission of the Service and comments received during scoping. We are soliciting your comments on issues, alternatives, and impacts to be addressed in the EIS.

A. No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no additional regulatory methods or strategies would be authorized. We would continue the use of special hunting seasons, the issuance of depredation permits, and the issuance of special Canada goose permits. These permits would continue to be issued under existing regulations.

For each of the next 5 alternatives, as a baseline for comparison, we would continue the use of special hunting seasons, the issuance of depredation permits, and the issuance of special Canada goose permits. All of these permits would continue to be issued under existing regulations.

B. Increased Promotion of Non-Lethal Control and Management

Under this alternative, we would actively promote the increased use of non-lethal management tools, such as habitat manipulation and management, harassment techniques, and trapping and relocation. While permits would continue to be issued under existing regulations, no additional regulatory

methods or strategies would be introduced.

C. Nest and Egg Depredation Order

This alternative would provide a direct population control strategy for resident Canada goose breeding areas in the U.S. This alternative would establish a depredation order authorizing States to implement a program allowing the take of nests and eggs to stabilize resident Canada goose populations without threatening their long-term health. Monitoring and evaluation programs are in place, or would be required, to estimate population sizes and prevent populations from falling below either the lower management thresholds established by Flyway Councils, or individual State population objectives. Since the goal of this alternative would be to stabilize breeding populations, not direct reduction, no appreciable reduction in the numbers of adult Canada geese would likely occur.

D. Depredation Order for Health and Human Safety

This alternative would establish a depredation order authorizing States to establish and implement a program allowing the take of resident Canada goose adults, goslings, nests and eggs from populations posing threats to health and human safety. The intent of this alternative is to significantly reduce or stabilize resident Canada goose populations at areas such as airports, water supply reservoirs, and other such areas, where there is a demonstrated threat to health and human safety, without threatening the population's long-term health. Monitoring and evaluation programs are in place, or would be required, to estimate population sizes and prevent populations from falling below either the lower management thresholds established by Flyway Councils, or individual State population objectives. Under this alternative, some appreciable localized reductions in the numbers of adult geese could occur.

E. Conservation Order

This alternative would authorize direct population control strategies such as nest and egg destruction, gosling and adult trapping and culling programs, or other general population reduction strategies on resident Canada goose populations in the U.S. This alternative would establish a conservation order authorizing States to develop and implement a program allowing the take of geese posing threats to health and human safety and damaging personal and public property. The intent of this

alternative is to significantly reduce or stabilize resident Canada goose populations at areas where conflicts are occurring without threatening the long-term health of the overall population. Monitoring and evaluation programs are in place, or would be required, to estimate population sizes and prevent populations from falling below either the lower management thresholds established by Flyway Councils, or individual State population objectives. State breeding populations would be monitored annually each spring to determine the maximum allowable take under the conservation order. Under this alternative, some appreciable

localized reductions in the numbers of adult geese would likely occur and lesser overall population reductions could occur.

F. General Depredation Order

This alternative would authorize direct population control strategies such as nest and egg destruction, gosling and adult trapping and culling programs, or other general population reduction strategies on resident Canada goose populations in the U.S. This alternative would establish a depredation order allowing any authorized person to take geese posing threats to health and human safety and damaging personal

and public property. The intent of this alternative is to significantly reduce resident Canada goose populations at areas where conflicts are occurring. Monitoring and evaluation programs are in place, or would be required, to estimate population sizes and prevent populations from falling below either the lower management thresholds established by Flyway Councils, or individual State population objectives. Under this alternative, some appreciable localized reductions in the numbers of adult geese would likely occur and lesser overall population reductions could occur.

	No action	Increased promotion of non-lethal control	Nest and egg depredation order	Health and human safety depredation order	Conservation order	General depredation order
Continued use of Special seasons.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Continued use of Depredation permits.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Continued use of Special Canada goose permits.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Promotion of non-lethal control and management.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Goal: Reduction or stabilization of population.	Stabilization	Stabilization	Stabilization	Both	Both	Both.
Additional take of nests and eggs.	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Additional take of adults and goslings.	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Additional population monitoring.	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes.
Implementation authority given to.	n/a	n/a	States	States	States	Affected parties.

Issue Resolution and Environmental Review

The primary issue to be addressed during the scoping and planning process for the EIS is to determine which management alternatives for the control of resident Canada goose populations will be analyzed. We will prepare a discussion of the potential effect, by alternative, which will include the following areas:

- (1) Resident Canada goose populations and their habitats.
- (2) Human health and safety.
- (3) Public and private property damage and conflicts.
- (4) Sport hunting opportunities.
- (5) Socioeconomic effects.

We will conduct the environmental review of the management action in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, as appropriate. We are furnishing this Notice in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7, to obtain suggestions and information from other agencies, tribes, and the public on the scope of issues to

be addressed in the EIS. A draft EIS should be available to the public in the spring of 2000.

Public Scoping Meetings

A schedule of public scoping meeting dates, locations, and times is not available at this time. We will publish a notice of any such meetings in the **Federal Register**.

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John G. Rogers,

Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 99-21472 Filed 8-18-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[MT-010-1430-01; MTM 84895]

Notice of Closure of Public Land to the Use of Motorized Vehicles and the Discharge of Firearms

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior

ACTION: Closure of 379.9 acres of public land to the use of motorized vehicles and the discharge of firearms.

SUMMARY: Notice is served that public land south of Laurel, Montana known as the Sundance Lodge Recreation Area (formerly the Altman Ranch), is closed to the use of motorized, off-highway vehicles (OHVs), and the discharge of any firearm including pellet guns, unless permitted by the authorized officer, Billings Field Office. This closure will remain in effect until public consultation is complete and an activity plan for the area is approved. OHV use includes all types of motor vehicles except for those authorized for administrative operations for farming and property maintenance or other BLM management programs. The area will remain open as a walk-in area for archery hunting, hiking, picnicking, cross-country skiing, bicycling, horseback riding, and wildlife watching. This closure is necessary to protect the public land, adjoining private property, and for public safety. The public land protected by this closure is located at:

Sundance Lodge Recreation Area

Principal Meridian, Montana

T. 2 S., R. 24 E.,

Sec. 22: Lots 5, and 6;

Sec. 23: Lots 3, and 4 excluding Tract 1 as described in Certificate of Survey #1750, Lots 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, and N2SW;

Sec. 24: Lot 2 excluding Tract 1 as described in Certificate of Survey #1750. Containing 379.9 acres.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Sandra S. Brooks, Field Manager, BLM, Billings Field Office, PO Box 36800, Billings, Montana 59107-6800 or call 406-896-5013.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Authority for this action is outlined in sections 302, 303, and 310 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1716) and Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 8341 (43 CFR 8341.2) and 8364 (43 CFR 8364.1). Any person who fails to comply with this closure is subject to arrest and a fine up to \$1,000 or imprisonment not to exceed 12 months, or both. This closure applies to all persons except persons authorized by the Bureau of Land Management.

Dated: August 12, 1999.

Sandra S. Brooks,

Field Manager.

[FR Doc. 99-21570 Filed 8-18-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-84-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service

Notice of Availability; Record of Decision, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park

AGENCY: National Park Service, Interior.

ACTION: The National Park Service announces the availability of the Record of Decision of the Final Impact Statement for the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park General Management Plan.

SUMMARY: The National Park Service has prepared the Record of Decision of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park General Management Plan pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality at 40 CFR 1505.2. A Record of Decision is a concise statement of the decision made, the basis for the decision, and the background of the project, including the decision making process, other alternatives considered, and public involvement. Concurrent with adopting this Record of Decision on the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park General Management Plan is approved.

The National Park Service began planning for the management of Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical

Park in 1993. The National Park Service presented and evaluated two management scenarios (the Proposal and the Alternative) in a Draft General Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The draft plan underwent sixty days of public and interagency review. After considering public and agency comment, the National Park Service produced the Final Environmental Impact Statement, which was available to the public for thirty days beginning on June 23, 1999. The National Park Service took no action for the thirty-day period of public availability, after which time the Park Service prepared the Record of Decision, selecting the Proposal as the final plan. The Record of Decision is now approved and available to the public.

Availability: Copies of the Record of Decision are available at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, 54 Elm Street, Woodstock, Vermont. For further information, please contact the Superintendent, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, PO Box 178, Woodstock, Vermont 05091; voice at (802) 457-3368; fax at (802) 457-3405.

Dated: August 6, 1999.

Marie Rust,

Director, Northeast Region.

[FR Doc. 99-21509 Filed 8-18-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-70-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service

General Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming

AGENCY: National Park Service, DOI.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the General Management Plan, Devils Tower National Monument.

SUMMARY: Under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service is preparing an environmental impact statement for the General Management Plan for Devils Tower National Monument.

The effort will result in a comprehensive general management plan that prescribes the resource conditions and visitor experiences that are to be achieved and maintained in the park over time. The clarification of what must be achieved according to law and policy will be based on review of the park's purpose, significance, special mandates, and the body of laws and