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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE AGAIN CONCLUDES
FORT HUACHUCA NOT JEOPARDIZING ENDANGERED SPECIES

FORT HUACHUCA, Ariz. - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army have completed formal consultation concerning the potential effects Fort Huachuca will have on threatened and endangered species. In a biological opinion signed today, the Service concluded that the Army's ongoing and planned operations are not likely to jeopardize the continued survival or recovery of any threatened and endangered species or result in adverse modification of critical habitat, on-post or in the nearby San Pedro River.

"The impressive array of healthy habitat types between the San Pedro River and summit of the Huachuca Mountains is a credit to the Army's commitment to stewardship and the dedicated staff at the Fort," said H. Dale Hall, Director of the Service's Southwest Region. "These consultations have resulted in a realistic 10-year plan that allows the Army to fulfill its mission without jeopardizing some of the nation's rarest species that rely upon the area."

"In practical terms, this means Fort Huachuca is in a position to execute missions required by the department of Army in support of national security," said Brig. Gen. James A. Marks, commanding general, U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca. "It also puts the Fort in a favorable position to expand and change some of those missions as needed."

The Fort will continue its dual mission of training soldiers in vital military intelligence skills and environmental stewardship. Fort Huachuca has been sustaining the land it defends since the 1880s and upholding the tradition is consistent with Army Values.

The biological opinion provides coverage under the Endangered Species Act for all land use, ongoing and planned training activities, construction activities, administration and support actions, recreation, fire management, and other activities proposed on the 73,142-acre installation and associated land.

A six week turn-around on the present biological opinion was possible due to the Army's commitment to definitive groundwater goals and an enhanced biological assessment and because the Army had already moved ahead of schedule on many of its 1999 commitments. "Much of the consultation and evaluation had been conducted while crafting the 1999 opinion," said Doug Duncan, the Service's principal consulting biologist. "The thorough treatment of the effects of the Fort and conservation measures provided in the Army's 2002 biological assessment made the rapid consultation process feasible and the resulting opinion credible. We've been very pleased with the level of cooperation that we've had with the Fort."

The Service previously issued a non-jeopardy opinion on October 27, 1999 based on a number of conservation measures to lessen the effect the Army's activities would have on listed plants and animals.

However, the 1999 biological opinion was set aside by the United States District Court, District of Arizona on April 11, 2002 due to a lack of specific, quantifiable conservation measures.

While the Department of Justice issued a protective notice of appeal of this decision, the Army also prepared a revised biological assessment of the Fort's activities addressing the Court's concerns and requested formal consultation with the Service. In the revised assessment upon which the consultation and resulting biological opinion are based, the Army included a rigorous analysis of the water deficit and a demographic evaluation of the number of people attributable to Fort Huachuca in the Sierra Vista Subwatershed. The study determined that there

is a deficit of 5,144 acre-feet in the sub watershed, which is significantly lower than the 7,000 acre-feet deficit recognized in 1999. The reduction in the deficit is the result of on-going water conservation efforts by the fort and local communities, including Sierra Vista's effluent recharge project. The study also concluded that 54 per cent of the residents in the sub watershed are attributable to the fort's presence. That means that the fort is responsible for 2,874 acre-feet of the annual deficit. In the BA, however, the Army commits to specific programs and timelines to mitigate 3,077 acre-feet of the deficit by the year 2011.

The Service concurred with the Army's assessment that their activities were not likely to adversely affect spikedace and loach minnow or their designated critical habitat, two small fish that historically occupied the San Pedro River just east of the Fort, or Canelo Hills ladies' tresses, an endangered orchid found in wetlands near the Fort. The consultation addressed the Fort's effects on populations of the southwestern willow flycatcher, Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, Sonora tiger salamander, and Huachuca water umbel--a semiaquatic plant, and designated critical habitat for the umbel and spotted owl. The Service found the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of those species or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

The Army proposed a number of conservation measures to lessen the effect their activities would have on listed plants and animals. These conservation measures include educating personnel on post to species' possible locations and needs, conducting preconstruction plant and wildlife surveys, protecting and monitoring species and their habitat, implementing fire, erosion and numerous water recharge, reuse and conservation projects, and cooperating with entities of the Upper San Pedro Partnership to balance the water budget in the Sierra Vista Subwatershed.