United States
Department of the Interior
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Southwest Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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March 30, 2011

Interested Parties,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to conduct maintenance at a site in the Kofa Wilderness known as Hidden Valley Tank. This is a natural bedrock pothole in the Hidden Valley Hills on the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) that collects and holds rainwater. Hidden Valley Tank has been identified as a critical source of water for desert bighorn sheep. Maintaining a viable desert bighorn sheep population is critical to fulfilling the Refuge's purpose.

This site has been maintained as a bighorn sheep water source for many years. In 1984, a 40-foot-tall steel ladder was constructed in the canyon below the tank to allow human access. Accumulated gravel was removed from Hidden Valley Tank in January 1985, and the tank was sealed with a thin coating of a cement-like product. A 12-foot-high masonry dam was constructed at the downstream side of the tank, and a sediment trap was placed above it. A 1500 square foot shade structure was built over the pothole in May 1985 to reduce evaporative loss of water. Since 1985, the cement coating has worn thin and is absent in several places. This is allowing accumulated water to escape and is significantly reducing water availability at the site. Maintenance is needed to restore the water-holding capacity of the site.

To complete the project, the Service will first remove and set aside any water that is currently in the tank. Then accumulated sediment, rock, and gravel will be removed and placed immediately downstream of the pothole. The bottom of the pothole will be cleaned and resealed with another thin layer of cement. The Service will then replace the saved water, and if needed, add supplemental water.

The project is expected to take place no later than June 30, 2011. To defray costs, the project will be implemented in partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department and interested conservation organizations.

More than 510,000 acres of the Refuge were designated wilderness by Congress in 1990. The Refuge's wilderness stewardship plan states that maintenance, modification and repair of wildlife waters may be considered on a case-by-case basis. As such, a draft minimum requirements decision guide has been prepared for this project per the Service's wilderness policy. This report is available upon request by contacting our office directly, or by downloading the document from our website at: http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/kofa/.

If you have any comments or concerns, please provide them in writing by May 6, 2011. Thank you for your interest in Kofa National Wildlife Refuge.

Mitch Ellis

Complex Manager
Southwest Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex