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News Release



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For Release: July 03, 2006

DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CONSERVATION ACTIONS TO PROTECT THE ENDANGERED MOUNTAIN YELLOW-LEGGED FROG RELEASED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of the southern California population of the mountain yellow-legged frog and its proposed critical habitat could range from \$7.5 million to \$8.9 million over the next 20 years. Release of this draft economic analysis also triggered the reopening of a public comment period. The Service will accept public comments until July 24, 2006.

Actions to conserve the mountain yellow-legged frog are likely to primarily impact recreational activities including trout fishing, hiking, camping, and rock climbing in the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests.

Significant uncertainty exists regarding the potential impact to trout fishing. The draft analysis applies two methodologies to put upper and lower bounds on the range of potential costs associated with lost fishing opportunities. The lower-bound estimate assumes anglers are unaffected because substitute fishing sites exist while the upper-bound estimate assumes fishing in areas proposed as critical habitat would be lost and not substituted. The actual impact is likely somewhere in between these two bounds.

More than 50 percent of the total impacts identified in the draft analysis are associated with welfare losses and other costs related to recreational fishing. Lost fishing opportunities occur in Big Rock Creek, South Fork, Little Rock Creek, and San Jacinto River, North Fork. The costs of modifications to fire management practices, costs of modifying hiking trails, and welfare losses to rock climbers resulting from a temporary closure of Williamson Rock in the area of Little Rock Creek account for approximately 30 and 40 percent of the total estimated impacts.

Mountain yellow-legged frogs are found in streams from southern California to high-elevation lakes in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Research indicates that mountain yellow-legged frogs in southern California are distinctly different from those in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

In 2002, the Service listed the mountain yellow-legged frog in southern California as an endangered distinct population segment of vertebrate species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On September 13, 2005, the Service proposed to designate 8,770 acres of critical habitat for the species.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the

conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Approximately 96 percent of the area proposed as critical habitat is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, with the remaining areas – about 119 acres – under State or private ownership.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species comes through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about the southern California population of mountain yellow-legged frog is available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760-431-9440.

Comments and information on the critical habitat proposal and draft economic analysis can be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or by facsimile to 760-431-9624. Comments may also be sent by electronic mail to fw1cfwo_myllpch@fws.gov.

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 545 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.

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