



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

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CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT WILL BENEFIT SOUTHERN IDAHO GROUND SQUIRRELS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has entered into a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Soulen Livestock Company, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the Governor's Office of Species Conservation to implement conservation measures for the southern Idaho ground squirrel. The ground squirrel, a federal candidate species, has experienced a significant decline in population throughout its range in southwestern Idaho in recent years.

Through the agreement, the parties will protect and enhance ground squirrel populations and habitat. Soulen Livestock will not allow shooting, trapping or poisoning of ground squirrels, and will allow agency personnel access to their property to conduct ground squirrel surveys, reintroductions and translocations. The Service issued a permit authorizing some impacts to southern Idaho ground squirrels as a result of Soulen Livestock's land use activities if the species is eventually listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The conservation effort will occur over about 43,000 acres of Soulen Livestock's land in Washington and Payette Counties, Idaho, for the next 20 years.

Margaret Soulen Hinson, of the Soulen Livestock Company, stated, "We saw two benefits from this project. First, it was a good way to demonstrate how landowners can work with federal and state wildlife management agencies. We all need to do a better job of this. Second, through our agreement, the interest demonstrated by other landowners in similar agreements, and the increased interest in southern Idaho ground squirrels, we believe we can prevent the need to list the species as threatened or endangered. And that benefits everyone."

Bob Ruesink, Snake River Basin Office supervisor, agreed with Ms. Soulen, noting that, "Fish and wildlife conservation today requires strong partnerships across many boundaries. This work is accomplished in a wide range of geographic areas or habitat conditions with varied methods and results, but no one agency or landowner can do the job alone. Dedicated partners such as Soulen Livestock and the state agencies involved in this agreement can make serious strides toward species conservation. That is what we are striving for in Idaho today."

The southern Idaho ground squirrel was identified as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act in October, 2001. Southern Idaho ground squirrels occur only in southwest Idaho, and are currently found in a 518,000-acre area in the Weiser River Basin. Current information indicates that the species has been declining throughout its range since 1985. Conservation measures implemented on private lands are important for the long-term survival of the southern Idaho ground

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squirrel. Eighty-five percent of the known occupied ground squirrel sites are located on private lands, primarily ranches and farms; 12% of the species' occupied sites are federally managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and 3% of the sites are on lands managed by Idaho Department of Lands.

Candidate Conservation Agreements allow for conservation activities in which participating landowners can voluntarily participate to benefit species that are proposed for listing under the ESA, or other sensitive species. The agreements encourage private and other non-federal property owners to implement conservation efforts and to reduce threats to unlisted species, assuring that landowners will not be subjected to increased property use restrictions if the species is listed during the period of the agreement.

For more information about private landowner conservation planning or Candidate Conservation Agreements, please contact Dennis Mackey at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709, (208) 378-5267.

FWS

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 more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 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 governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.