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News Release



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For more information, see the attached Q&A. The draft economic analysis and other information about the proposed critical habitat are available on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/sacramento/>

Draft Economic Analysis Released for Proposed Critical Habitat For Pacific Coast Population of Western Snowy Plover

Public comment accepted for 30 days

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft analysis of the economic impacts of 35 proposed critical-habitat units along the coast of California, Oregon and Washington for the Pacific coast population of the western snowy plover, a federally protected species. Today's action re-opens a 30-day comment period on the proposed rule.

The draft report estimates costs from 2005 through 2025 at the proposed critical habitat units will be between \$273 million and \$645 million, with the biggest costs due to beach recreation losses. Other losses may be due to plover management and in impacts to real estate development, military base operations and gravel extraction. The economic analysis was prepared by Industrial Economics Inc. (link <http://www.indecon.com/>) of Cambridge, Mass.

Over three-quarters of the projected impact occurs in five proposed California critical habitat units, located on Monterey Bay (two), Pismo Beach, Morro Bay and Coronado's Silver Strand.

In Oregon, the potential costs associated with the critical habitat proposal are estimated to range from \$3,275,000 to \$6,174,000 over the next 20 years. In Washington, the critical habitat proposal is not expected to have an economic impact.

In its notice the Service, among other subjects, asked for “Specific information that would help us further understand the effects of designation on small business that depend on recreation and tourism. Based on the information we receive on small business that depend on recreation and tourism, we are considering excluding areas based on disproportionate costs from the final designation.”

The Service last December released the proposed critical habitat for the western snowy plover, and it conducted an initial 60-day comment period. The court-established deadline for submittal of the final designation is Sept. 20, 2005. The proposal is in response to a lawsuit filed by the Coos County Board of County Commissioners.

The proposed critical habitat units total 17,299 acres, less than an earlier critical habitat plan the Service adopted in 1999. Of the proposed units, 26 are in California, six are in Oregon, and three are in Washington. Of the total acreage, 4,456 acres, or 26 percent, are on Federal lands; 8,893 acres, or 51 percent, are owned by states or local agencies; and 3,950 acres, or 23 percent, are private. The new proposal calls for more critical habitat units but generally smaller ones, based on increased knowledge of the species’ needs and better mapping.

Comments may be submitted 1) by email to fw8snowyplover@fws.gov, or 2) by mail to Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office, 1655 Heindon Road, Arcata, California 95521, or 3) by fax to 707-822-8411.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act (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.

The Service initially designated critical habitat for the Pacific Coast population of the western snowy plover in 1999. In 2003, a Federal court directed the Service to review the critical habitat under new criteria and re-issue its proposal by Dec. 1, 2004. This released action responds to the mandate from the court. The current proposal calls for 35 units, compared to 28 units in the 1999 plan, but covers only 17,299 acres, compared to 19,474 acres in the 1999 plan.

Critical habitat has no regulatory impact on private landowners taking actions on their land, unless they are doing something that involves Federal funding or permits. The 1993 listing of the plover as “threatened” under the provisions of the ESA provides broad protection for the species. Under the ESA, no one may harm or injure this species.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to 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 will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act 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 Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed endangered species is provided on many of the national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and on state wildlife management areas.

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, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management 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 governments 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.