



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office
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April 25, 2008

Cons. #2-22-05-F-143

Ms. Jacque Buchanan, Acting Forest Supervisor
Lincoln National Forest
1101 New York Avenue
Alamogordo, New Mexico 88310-6992

Dear Ms. Buchanan:

On April 21, 2008, we issued a final biological opinion (BO) on the proposed Perk-Grindstone Fuel Reduction Project, on the Smokey Bear Ranger District, Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico. Because there has been some confusion related to one of our conclusions within the BO as it relates to the proposed treatments, catastrophic wildfire, and Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) (MSO) and its designated critical habitat we are clarifying this conclusion in this amendment to the BO. Accordingly, the following paragraph is substituted for the second paragraph on page 33 of the Biological Opinion issued to your agency on April 21, 2008. The change from the original paragraph is italicized.

We recognize that there is an inherent risk with respect to the probability of stand replacing wildfire within MSO habitat in the project area. As noted, the Recovery Plan (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 1995) provides specific guidelines that encourage a proactive approach to reduce fuel risks and simultaneously enhance MSO prey habitat. The intent of the MSO guidelines in the Recovery Plan (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 1995) is not to preserve MSO PACs in perpetuity, but rather to protect them until it can be demonstrated that replacement habitat can be created through active management. The Recovery Plan (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 1995) also indicates that habitat heterogeneity from fires can create patches that would benefit the MSO and its prey. Insect and mistletoe mortality are similar disturbance mechanisms, in that they also create mosaics within MSO habitat. *The Forest Service concluded that, based on current conditions, the potential for high-severity crown fire presents the largest threat to the MSO in the project area. While we agree that high-severity crown fire presents a significant threat to MSO, we also believe that cumulative adverse impacts to MSO resulting from repeated execution of projects as proposed here, will pose an equally significant threat to the MSO within the Recovery Area. Therefore, we strongly encourage the Forest Service to develop future projects within the Wildland Urban*

Interface in manners that are consistent with their Land and Resource Management Plans and the respective 1996 amendments to prevent adverse cumulative impacts to the MSO.
In future communications regarding this project please refer to consultation #2-22-05-F-143. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any part of this biological opinion, please contact Eric Hein or Lynn Gemlo of my staff.

Sincerely,

Wally Murphy
Acting State Administrator

cc:

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