



News Release

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www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SEEKS INPUT ON SALT RIVER PROJECT HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Salt River Project invite public review of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and draft habitat conservation plan (HCP) designed to address threatened and endangered species concerns and the operation of two reservoirs that store water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural use in central Arizona.

SRP has requested a permit to incidentally take sensitive and federally protected species that may result from the operation of Horseshoe and Bartlett dams on the Verde River. The Service is evaluating the issuance of such a permit in light of SRP's draft habitat conservation plan that commits to reducing, minimizing and offsetting effects to covered species for 50 years.

The Service and SRP will hold a public meeting to accept oral and written comments on Aug. 29, 2007, 6-9 p.m., at the administration offices of the Salt River Project, 1521 N. Project Drive (Galvin Parkway and Van Buren Street – east of Phoenix Municipal Stadium), Tempe, Ariz.

Operation of the two reservoirs may affect 200-400 acres of endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and rare yellow-billed cuckoo habitat at the upper end of Horseshoe Reservoir. Reservoir operations can also favor nonnative fish species that prey upon or compete with the Verde River's native fishes, leopard frogs, and gartersnakes.

"SRP has developed a flexible dam operation program that will benefit and rejuvenate riparian habitat at Horseshoe Reservoir and give native fishes, frogs and gartersnakes of the lower Verde basin a real recovery opportunity," said Steve Spangle, Service Arizona Field Office Supervisor. "SRP has again partnered with natural resource agencies to conserve some of Arizona's key fish and wildlife species while still fulfilling their water rights and delivery mission."

Species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act are protected from "take," including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying their habitat. The Service may however, under limited circumstances, issue permits to take federally listed species when such a taking is incidental to – and not the purpose of – otherwise lawful activities and the taking does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

The Service is evaluating SRP's draft HCP and considering issuing a permit for the incidental take of endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow and Gila topminnow; threatened spinedace and loach minnow, and federally protected bald eagle. The plan also addresses nine unlisted species – the yellow-billed cuckoo, roundtail chub, longfin and speckled daces, Sonora and desert suckers, northern Mexican and narrow-headed gartersnakes and lowland leopard frog, and seeks permits should those species be federally listed in the future.

SRP is committing to manage reservoir levels to favor willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo habitat, while also minimizing the production of nonnative fishes that threaten sensitive aquatic species. Additionally, river-side habitat will be acquired along the Verde and Gila rivers for covered bird species, a fish barrier will be constructed to exclude nonnative fish from Lime Creek to protect native fish and leopard frogs, and a State native fish hatchery will be expanded for the production and stocking of native fish. In total, SRP and the City of Phoenix are committing up to \$8.8 million in habitat acquisition and management, native fish production and stocking, and monitoring over the 50-year period. The City of Phoenix is a partner in the HCP because it has substantial water rights in Horseshoe Reservoir.

Written comments on the draft EIS and HCP should be received by Sept. 24, 2007, and should be mailed to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Ariz. 85021; faxed to (602) 242-2513; or electronically submitted to Horseshoe-BartlettHCP@fws.gov.

The Service's evaluation of the permit request is prepared in a draft EIS. The draft EIS, SRP's draft HCP and supporting documents are available electronically at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/HCPs.htm>. Printed and CD copies of the documents are also available by contacting Mr. Charles Paradzick, Salt River Project, P.O. Box 52025, Phoenix, Ariz., 85072-2026 at (602) 236-2724.

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 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 547 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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