

ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT 2005 SOUTHWEST ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT TEAM

Calendar Year 2005 accomplishments by the Southwest Endangered Species Act (SWESA) Team are:

1. In coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Conservation Training Center, the SWESA Team executed two Biological Assessment workshops in Albuquerque, New Mexico and two in Phoenix, Arizona that were presented in January 2005 and October 2005, respectively. Total attendance was 116 students. At the beginning of each workshop, a questionnaire was distributed to assess implementation of the streamlining process developed by the SWESA Team in 1999. Participants with at least several years of experience implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA) expressed increased satisfaction with the section 7 process in the Southwest, in both informal and formal consultation with the USFWS. Course evaluations after the class demonstrated that the workshops were very highly rated and that the participants would recommend them to colleagues.
2. The SWESA Team received FY 2005 funding in the amount of \$105,000.00 through a Department of Defense grant program (LEGACY Program) to prepare a Considerations for Making Effects Determinations [CMED](formerly called guidance criteria) document, produce a species at risk report, and develop awareness products. The USFWS obligated \$80,000.00 to prepare a CMED document for the Chiricahua leopard frog. The remaining \$25,000.00 was provided to the U.S. Forest Service to produce the species-at-risk report and develop the awareness products.
3. The SWESA Team completed a revision of the Team charter on May 17, 2005 to refocus the direction of the Team based on guidance provided to the SWESA Team by the Southwest Strategy (SWS) Regional Executive Committee concerning affiliate groups.
4. The SWESA Team continues to maintain the list of Issue Resolution Teams (IRTs) to be used by SWS member agencies to address section 7 consultation issues when an impasse is reached between the action agency and the USFWS at the field level. The IRT process has been used successfully to date by several agencies.

5. At the request of the Water Task Team of the SWS, the SWESA Team drafted several sections of their final report titled “Strategy for Long-Term Management of Exotic Trees in Riparian Areas for New Mexico’s Five River Systems, 2005-2014”. The drafted sections concerned the ecological and biological causes for tamarisk spread and recommended techniques for conversion to native vegetation to benefit native and endangered species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher.
6. At the request of the Executive Director of the SWS, a representative of the SWESA Team gave a presentation about the past, present and future of the SWS to the USFWS Student Career Experience Program Orientation.
7. A representative of the SWESA Team was also invited to speak about SWESA Team activities on “The Interagency Inter-State Species of Concern List and Efforts to Help Conserve Species During Drought” at the third annual Governor’s Drought Summit in New Mexico. This conference was attended by approximately 220 individuals.

The SWESA Team will remain a SWS affiliate and will continue the multi-year Biological Assessment Workshop training effort sponsored by SWS member agencies, as well as other projects that facilitate implementation of the ESA and help conserve species of concern in the Southwest. Provided as an attachment to this report are several examples of projects in Arizona or New Mexico where streamlining techniques and early coordination were used to improve the section 7 consultation process with the USFWS.

Recent Examples of Section 7 Streamlining and Related Efforts in Arizona and New Mexico Through December 2006

Throughout the western U.S., federal agencies are working with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and NOAA-Fisheries to agree upon more efficient and effective compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These efforts were initiated due to the growing volume of work associated with section 7 consultations in times of reducing agency staff to perform that work. In contrast to a “traditional” section 7 consultation, these “streamlining” techniques can take different forms. For example:

- Many similar projects may be ‘batched’ into a single consultation, rather than separate consultations for each project.
- A ‘programmatic’ consultation may set the framework for design of future projects. Guided by the framework, projects are assured to fall into the realm of ‘no effect’ or ‘not likely to adversely affect’ listed species.
- A ‘consultation agreement’ may be entered into to document the timelines and analyses required for a complex consultation.

In addition to the specific examples below, many federal agencies are employing the method of ‘early consultation’. This practice involves the FWS staff early in the development of a project, so their suggestions to reduce project effects to listed species can be incorporated into the original design of the project, rather than added later. These meetings and field visits also give FWS an opportunity to share information on how best to prepare an analysis of the effects in the section 7 documentation. The net result is consultations with fewer delays for additional information, and better-designed projects with reduced impacts to listed species.

- The Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (MSCP) is a coordinated, comprehensive, long-term multi-agency effort to conserve and recover endangered species, and protect and maintain wildlife habitat on the lower Colorado River. Implementation of the program began in April 2005 with the signing of a Record of Decision by the Secretary of the Interior. The MSCP's purposes are: protect the lower Colorado River environment while ensuring the certainty of existing river water and power operations, address the needs of threatened and endangered wildlife under the Endangered Species Act, and prevent the listing of additional species on the lower Colorado River. The Bureau of Reclamation, in consultation and partnership with a Steering Committee made up of representatives from the 56 participating entities, is the primary implementing agency for this activity. The Secretary has directed all Interior bureaus to help implement the MSCP.
- Saguaro National Park consultation on the Fire Management Plan for a 5-to-10 year period. The Plan addresses most fire management operations (prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and mechanical fuels treatments) for a 5-year period. It may be extended if monitoring shows this is warranted. Wildland fire suppression will continue to be consulted upon under Emergency Consultation procedures due to the infeasibility of projecting those firefighting effects. This replaces consultation for individual fire projects, and the staff time that would be involved. A key component of the consultation is an annual summary of fire effects in the park, and a meeting with FWS to review the summary and agree

upon adjustments to planned fire management activities.

- Forest Service Regional Programmatic Land and Resource Management Plan Consultation. This consultation addressed the continued implementation of the Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) for the 11 National Forests and National Grasslands in the Southwestern Region of the Forest Service. The consultation was conducted at the Regional level and addressed effects to 36 federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and seven designated or proposed critical habitats until the time that the individual Forest Plans are revised (potentially 8 to 10 years). The consultation was developed under the guidance of the 2000 National Memorandum of Agreement for Streamlining Programmatic Consultations and was completed through the implementation of a Consultation Agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service. The primary benefit of this effort was the reduction in work load at the field level for both agencies.
- Forest Service Southwestern Region Framework for Streamlining Informal Consultation for Livestock Grazing Activities. This document provides a framework for streamlining informal consultation. The document contains guidance criteria to make ESA section 7 effect determinations of “no effect” or “not likely to adversely affect” for 33 threatened, endangered, and proposed species and/or proposed or designated critical habitat for livestock grazing activities. This document was jointly prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service Regional offices and can be applied to livestock grazing activities on all National Forest or National Grasslands in the Forest Service Southwestern Region. The document has decreased the time required to obtain concurrence for livestock grazing activities on Forest Service lands.
- Forest Service Wildland Urban Interface Regional Programmatic Consultation This Regional programmatic consultation addressed the effects of implementing vegetation density reduction prescriptions in 281 Wildland Urban Interface areas found on the 11 National Forests in the Forest Service Southwestern Region. The consultation addressed 31 threatened, endangered, and proposed species and/or their designated or proposed critical habitats and was accomplished at the Regional level under a consultation agreement following the guidance of the 2000 National Memorandum of Agreement for Streamlining Consultation. This consultation has resulted in a tremendous reduction in workload for both agencies - one consultation as opposed to 281 individual project consultations.
- In Arizona, BLM conducted a programmatic State-wide plan amendment and consultation on all the land use plans for fire, fuels and air management. One result is identification of conservation measures for listed, proposed, and candidate species that will be included in project designs, to reduce or eliminate project effects to listed species. The consultation also included emergency fire suppression actions such that, in most cases, if conservation measures are being used, additional consultation would not be required.
- Through an Interagency Agreement, BLM and FWS are partnering in the production of seven new Resource Management Plans in Arizona. FWS is

providing early conservation input into the RMPs, helping with reviews, and will be expediting formal consultation. Early coordination will help implement the four agency Memorandum of Agreement between BLM, FWS, NOAA-Fisheries, and USFS on programmatic consultations for land-use planning. Included in BLM and FWS work is an agreement to work together in the planning and consultation process on candidate species. Because of the extra workload, BLM is contributing monetarily to the FWS for this effort.

- The BLM in New Mexico developed a process for conducting Section 7 consultation on livestock grazing permit renewals. It involves early coordination and achieves a more consistent approach and project batching, which saves time.
- The BLM in New Mexico and FWS conducted programmatic Section 7 consultation on Fire Management Plans.

Other Cooperative Work Related to ESA

- The Arizona BLM is participating with many agencies led by Arizona Game and Fish Department and Fish and Wildlife Service Arizona Ecological Services Field Office toward a Conservation Assessment and Agreement for the Sonoran Desert Tortoise, a State-listed species of concern. The document will help land and resource managers allocate resources and efforts to conserve the Sonoran desert tortoise such that it need not be Federally listed as threatened or endangered. Other participants include, but are not limited to, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Arizona State Land Department, Air Force, Marines, Army, Forest Service, FWS Refuges, and some Indian tribes.
- The NRCS is a partner, with others, on the Altar Valley Fire Management Plan. The planning includes NEPA and ESA documents to re-apply fire as a tool for rangeland management in a manner that ensures conservation of listed species. Partners in the work are: Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona State Land Department, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Pima County, The Nature Conservancy, and the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance. The species considered include: Pima pineapple cactus, Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, Lesser long-nosed bat, Western yellow billed cuckoo, Chiricahua leopard frog, Southwestern willow flycatcher, Masked bobwhite quail, Kearney's bluestar, and Jaguar. This Fire Management Plan will batch informal consultation on these species. Benefits of this approach are enhancement of endangered species habitat, reduction in overall agencies' future workload, and assurance for private ranchers that their future fire management activities will be approved for implementation in the field.
- The Forest Service leads an effort to create an Interstate/Interagency Sensitive Species List. The species are those that may to be considered for ESA listing in the future. Action to improve their condition could avoid the need for such listing. Agreement on a single list of species at risk allows all agencies to focus attention and coordinate efforts. The work also gives biologists an opportunity to understand which land managers should give a particular species priority attention.

