

**PRELIMINARY ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN SEEKING AN
EXPANSION OF CONDOR RECOVERY TO A NEW SITE
(effective 12/30/13)**

Wildlife agency support. Obtaining the support of the state's wildlife agency is a crucial step. Management of an endangered species will require Federal as well as state permits and oversight. In addition, obligations that arise from the reintroduction of a species will potentially affect other wildlife decisions that may be an exclusive state responsibility, such as hunting regulations and potentially local land use decisions. Information regarding the occurrence of carrion in the release environment, the nature of hunting programs that could potentially leave carrion and other considerations will be important and are within the state's purview.

Funding and Management responsibility. At least for the short-term, condor management is likely to remain extremely management intensive. There will likely be needs for proffered feeding, tracking, capture and testing, veterinary care, carcass recovery, and nest management. All of these activities must be conducted consistent with the requirements of the Condor Recovery Program as documented in the recovery plan and other materials. A responsible organization that has the institutional capacity, longevity and financing to sustain a permanent commitment to support a population of condors would need to be identified. In the past, sponsoring organizations have included local non-profits, international non-profits, and governmental organizations. Further, a well-trained and permitted staff would be required (see Permitting and other environmental compliance section below). The intensive management currently the norm in the condor recovery program costs a great deal of money, and we do not anticipate that the Service will have resources to provide additional funding for this program in the foreseeable future.

Coordination/cooperation with the overall Condor Recovery Program partners. Cooperation with the existing recovery program, including other release sites, field teams, captive breeding programs and veterinary programs will be essential for a successful release program. The captive breeding program supplies releasable birds and replacement eggs as necessary and consistent with recovery goals. The recovery program would have to determine which animals are qualified for release from the captive breeding programs and from existing release sites. Selection of appropriate birds for a new site would be based on considerations such as maintaining genetic diversity, demographic information (age, sex, etc.), and maintenance of the existing wild populations. These determinations are made by the program as a whole, not by individual partner organizations. Any new release operation would need to commit to this coordination and partnership.

Addressing threats, especially lead. In our 5-year review of the listing status of the California condor, we identified and assessed 13 threats, ranging from habituation to power lines and poles, to the effects of lead, particularly from ingested spent ammunition. Since that time, vehicle traffic and firefighting "dip" tanks have been identified as additional threats. Any proposal to reintroduce condors would have to address these threats in a meaningful way. As an example, California has passed legislation to eliminate the use of lead ammunition; Arizona and Utah operate extensive voluntary programs to address the same threat. Identification of appropriate approaches to reducing and/or eliminating lead and some support for addressing this important threat would have to be identified.

Evaluation of habitat potential. It is essential that the location of a proposed release site be evaluated feeding habitat, overnight roosting sites and nest caves or trees. While no final determination of the suitability of a particular site is possible without observing condor behavior at that location, identification of the potential for all three types of habitat in reasonable proximity would be a key element of the Service's consideration. Viable year round food sources that do not contain spent lead ammunition are essential for condor survival.

Flight pen and release site. Any release site would have to include a flight pen that is not generally accessible to the public. Birds scheduled for release should have as little interaction with humans as possible to avoid the habituation problems that have endangered some individual condors. The pen would have to meet specifications that reflect the knowledge and experience that has been obtained at the existing release sites as to the best designs and management practices to ensure condor health and well-being. Ownership or management control of the release site, and appropriate access control and security are characteristics which will be evaluated.

Permitting and other environmental compliance. Release of California condors requires a number of permits, including, but not necessarily limited to, a recovery permit (i.e., Endangered Species Act section 10(a)(1)(A) permit), a Migratory Bird Treaty Act permit, Federal Bird Marking and Salvage permit, and any state permits. In addition, there are a number of environmental reviews that must be completed, including, but not limited to, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act on issuance of a recovery permit, and any state-level environmental compliance review. The applicant would need to supply us with the information necessary to complete these reviews. Finally, it is possible that the Service would choose to amend the recovery plan prior to approving a new northern release site.