



# United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Pacific Southwest Region  
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2606  
Sacramento, California 95825

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
FWS/R/CONDOR

Charles Bonham, Director  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor  
Sacramento, California 95814

JAN 21 2014

Dear Mr. Bonham:

The purpose of this letter is to address formal and informal inquiries that we have received for several years regarding establishment of a California Condor (*Gymnogyps Californianus*) release site in northern California and/or Oregon. We appreciate the level of interest that has been expressed by our partner organizations in the possibility of developing a new release site in the Pacific Northwest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has contributed for several years to the Yurok Tribe's wildlife program with the potential for the development of such a program in mind. The Oregon Zoo has generated a great deal of public interest in condors with their participation in the Condor Recovery Program's captive breeding program, support for research into potential reintroduction sites and contaminants in food resources, and in the development of the soon to open condor exhibit at the Zoo. Our State partners and other partner organizations and individuals have participated in various forums, conferences and discussion groups about the possibility of a release site in the Pacific Northwest (including far northern California).

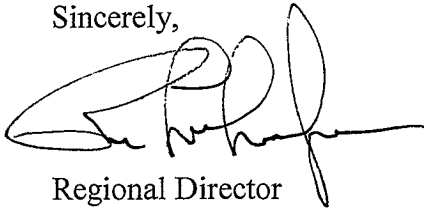
Although not explicitly stated in our 1996 Recovery Plan, it is likely that the establishment of self-sustaining population of California condors in the Pacific Northwest would substantively contribute to their recovery. Catastrophic loss of condor populations remains a real threat, as exemplified by a recent incident in which seventy percent of tested condors in the southern California population were taken to the Los Angeles Zoo for chelation treatment due to lead exposure. Furthermore, vultures, including condors, are particularly susceptible to poisoning, and a small percentage of contaminated carcasses can have catastrophic population effects. By creating additional and separate populations, the possibility of catastrophic losses would be limited to a smaller proportion of the population as a whole. In addition, the effects of climate change are likely to be distributed disproportionately throughout the species' vast historical range; therefore, establishment of additional populations in a variety of ecological settings is likely to increase the chances that condors will be viable into the future in the face of climate change.

While we recognize the advantages of establishing a new population of condors in their historical range, we also recognize a number of challenges. In the attached document, we identify several key issues that will need to be addressed for us to consider issuance of a recovery permit for a new release site. Anyone seeking formal approval for establishing a release site should review the attached information, consult directly with their local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Field Office and the California Condor Recovery Coordinator, and review the issuance requirements for recovery permits at 50 CFR 17.22.

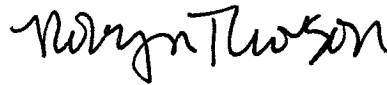
The preliminary list of attached issues is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to be a starting point for additional deliberations. As always, it is best to coordinate with the Service's assigned biological staff in advance of dedicating any resources to addressing these and other issues. Were the Service to receive a permit application for an additional release site that addresses all issues, including permit issuance criteria, both Region 1 (Portland, OR) and Region 8 (Sacramento, CA) would formally assess that application and would work with the applicant to identify any remaining issues that needed attention, including Tribal Consultation if appropriate.

Thank you once again for your interest in, and support of condor recovery. If you have questions, please contact John McCamman, California Condor Coordinator, at (916) 414-6636.

Sincerely,



Regional Director  
Region 8



Regional Director  
Region 1

Attachment