



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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December 16, 2013

Timothy M. Hill, Administrator
Office of Environmental Services
Ohio Department of Transportation
1980 West Broad Street, Mail Stop 4170
Columbus, OH 43216-0899

TAILS: 03E15000-2014-I-0185
03E15000-2014-CPA-0100

Attn: Michael Pettegrew, Matt Raymond

RE: **FRA-70-11.28 (PID 81828)**

Dear Mr. Hill:

This letter is in response to your November 13, 2013 request for site-specific review of the above referenced project, pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). Your request was received in our office on November 15, 2013. The project, as proposed, involves reconstruction of the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange, including improvements to I-70 from Mound Street to Front Street, I-71 from south of Greenlawn Avenue to the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange, and SR-315 from the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange to Town Street. The project is located in the City of Columbus, Franklin County, Ohio. The proposed project would result in approximately 1,256 linear feet of impact to the Scioto River, 0.037 acre of Category 1 wetland, and 17.8 acres of riparian and upland woods.

FISH & WILDLIFE COORDINATION ACT COMMENTS:

The Service recommends that impacts to the Scioto River and any native riparian woody vegetation be avoided to the extent possible. We recommend that ODOT coordinate with ODNR to minimize impacts to freshwater mussels. We also recommend that project designs consider possible future removal of the Greenlawn dam, i.e., that the project would be compatible with a free-flowing Scioto River (which would result from removal of the Greenlawn dam).

BALD EAGLE:

You have determined that the project will have no effect on the **bald eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). We agree with your assessment and believe that take of bald eagles resulting from the proposed project is unlikely.

FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES:

The proposed project lies within the range of the federally endangered **rayed bean** (*Villosa fabalis*), **northern riffleshell** (*Epioblasma torulosa rangiana*), **clubshell** (*Pleurobema clava*), **snuffbox** (*Epioblasma triquetra*), and the federally threatened **rabbitsfoot** (*Quadrula c. cylindrica*). Although the project is within a Group 4 stream in the Ohio Mussel Survey Protocol, it is within a modified and

impounded deep pool habitat. You have determined that the project site does not provide suitable habitat for any of these species. A mussel survey conducted in 2005 did not detect any of these species. In two previous letters (in January 2006 and March 2008), we stated that impacts to federally listed mussels are unlikely. You have determined that the project will have no effect on federally listed mussels. You have also determined that the project will have no effect on the federally endangered **Scioto madtom** (*Noturus trautmani*). Therefore, consultation pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the ESA is not required for these species.

The proposed project lies within the range of the **northern long-eared bat** (*Myotis septentrionalis*), a species currently proposed as federally endangered. The subject project would result in impacts to approximately 17.8 acres of forested habitat. Any unavoidable tree clearing will occur only between September 30 and April 1. We concur with your determination that the project, as proposed, is not likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat.

Indiana Bat - Tier 2 Biological Opinion:

On January 26, 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Statewide Transportation Program. This PBO established a two-tiered consultation process for ODOT activities, with issuance of the programmatic opinion being Tier 1 and all subsequent site-specific project analyses constituting Tier 2 consultations. Under this tiered process, the Service will produce tiered biological opinions when it is determined that site-specific projects are likely to adversely affect federally listed species. When *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* determinations are made, the Service will review those projects and if justified, provide written concurrence and section 7(a)(2) consultation will be considered completed for those site-specific projects.

In issuing the PBO (Tier 1 biological opinion), we evaluated the effects of all ODOT actions outlined in your Biological Assessment on the federally listed Indiana bat. Your current request for Service review of the FRA-70-11.28 (PID81828) I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange project is a Tier 2 consultation under the January 26, 2007, PBO. We have reviewed the information contained in the letter and supporting materials submitted by your office describing the effects of the proposed project on federally listed species. We concur with your determination that the action is *likely to adversely affect* the Indiana bat. As such, this review focuses on determining whether: (1) this proposed site-specific project falls within the scope of the Tier 1 PBO, (2) the effects of this proposed action are consistent with those anticipated in the Tier 1 PBO, and (3) the appropriate conservation and mitigation measures identified in the biological assessment are adhered to.

That is, this letter serves as the Tier 2 biological opinion for the proposed the FRA-70-11.28 (PID81828) I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange project. As such, this letter also provides the level of incidental take that is anticipated and a cumulative tally of incidental take that has been authorized and exempted in the PBO.

Description of the Proposed Action

Your letter and supporting materials include the location and a thorough description of the proposed action. The action, as proposed, involves reconstruction of the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange, including improvements to I-70 from Mound Street to Front Street, I-71 from south of Greenlawn Avenue to the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange, and SR-315 from the I-70/I-71/SR-315 interchange to Town Street. The project will disturb up to 17.8 acres of wooded habitat, including 14 potential Indiana bat roost trees. No potential maternity roost trees would be impacted. ODOT will implement the following conservation measures to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate adverse impacts to the Indiana bat:

1) A-1: Any unavoidable tree removal will take place between September 30 and April 1 to avoid direct impacts. **The Service appreciates ODOT's use of the revised tree clearing dates of September 30 and April 1.**

2) M-6: Big Darby Creek research bank.

Status of the Species

Species description, distribution, life history, population dynamics, and status are fully described on pages 13-26 for the Indiana bat in the PBO and are hereby incorporated by reference. Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there has been no change in the status of the species.

Species descriptions, life histories, population dynamics, status and distributions are fully described on pages 23-30 for the Indiana bat in the PBO and are hereby incorporated by reference. The most recent population estimate indicates 424,708 Indiana bats occur rangewide (King 2011). The current revised Indiana Bat Recovery Plan: First Revision (2007) delineates recovery units based on population discreteness, differences in population trends, and broad level differences in land-use and macrohabitats. There are currently four recovery units for the Indiana bat: Ozark-Central, Midwest, Appalachian Mountains, and Northeast. All of Ohio falls within the Midwest Recovery Unit.

In 2007, white nose syndrome (WNS) was found to fatally affect several species of bats, including the Indiana bat, in eastern hibernacula. To date, WNS is known from New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Virginia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Missouri, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana as well as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec in Canada. The extent of the impact this syndrome may have on the species rangewide is uncertain, but based on our current limited understanding of WNS, we expect mortality of bats at affected sites to be high (personal communication, L. Pruitt, 2008).

Environmental Baseline

The environmental baseline for the species listed above was fully described on pages 21-26 of the PBO and is hereby incorporated by reference. Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there has been no change in the environmental baseline.

Status of the species within the action area

Since the issuance of the PBO in 2007, there have been no new Indiana bat capture records within the vicinity of this project. Your letter and supporting materials state that suitable habitat exists within the action area, thus we are assuming presence.

Effects of the Action

Based on analysis of the information provided in your letter and supporting documentation, we have determined that the effects of the proposed action are consistent with those contemplated and fully described on pages 31-35 of the PBO. Adverse effects to the Indiana bat from this project could occur due to the removal of 17.8 acres of wooded habitat, including 14 potential roost trees. As no trees exhibiting characteristics of maternity roost habitat will be removed for the project, the Service anticipates that any effects on an extant maternity colony will be insignificant. In addition, implementation of seasonal cutting restrictions will avoid direct adverse effects to individual bats.

Adult male and non-reproductive female Indiana bats may be indirectly exposed to loss of roosting habitat. In general, effects on these individual bats would be less severe than the effects associated with individuals of maternity colonies. Adult male and non-reproductive female Indiana bats are not subject to the physiological demands of pregnancy and rearing young.

Males and non-reproductive females typically roost alone or occasionally in small groups. When these individuals are displaced from roosts they must utilize alternative roosts or seek out new roosts. Because these individuals are not functioning as members of maternity colonies, they do not face the challenge of reforming as a colony. Roost tree requirements for non-reproductive Indiana bats are less specific whereas maternity colonies generally require larger roost trees to accommodate multiple members of a colony. Therefore, it is anticipated that adverse indirect effects to non-reproductive bats will be less than the effects to reproductively active females. The Service anticipates that indirect effects to non-reproductive Indiana bats from the loss of roosting habitat will be insignificant.

In addition, scientific research on the Indiana bat, conducted between 2008 – 2010 and funded by ODOT (mitigation measure M-6), provided additional insights into Indiana bat maternity colony behavior in Ohio relative to roosting, foraging, and rearing of offspring. The study captured and radiotracked 51 Indiana bats along the Big Darby Creek in Pickaway County, Ohio. Through this effort, 56 roost trees were identified and described, and the animals' home ranges were calculated. These data have further enhanced our understanding of the habitat characteristics within the home range of Indiana bat maternity colonies and how the bats may move among and utilize those features of the landscape. In addition, recaptures of Indiana bats banded during earlier studies provided further insights into the species' site fidelity and its associated effects on reproduction and survival.

We are not aware of any non-federal actions in the action area that are reasonably certain to occur. Thus, we do not anticipate any cumulative effects associated with this project.

Conclusion

We believe the proposed FRA-70-11.28 interchange project is consistent with the PBO. After reviewing site specific information, including 1) the scope of the project, 2) the environmental baseline, 3) the status of the Indiana bat and its assumed presence within the project area, 4) the effects of the action, and 5) any cumulative effects, it is the Service's biological opinion that this project is *not likely to jeopardize* the continued existence of the Indiana bat.

Incidental Take Statement

The Service anticipates that the proposed action will result in incidental take associated with projects in the Central management unit. Incidental take for this project, based on the potential removal of approximately 17.8 acres, results in the cumulative incidental take of 118.05 acres for this management unit. This project, added to the cumulative total of incidental take for the implementation of ODOT's Statewide Transportation Program, is well within the level of incidental take anticipated in the 2007 PBO (see table below).

Management Unit	IT anticipated in PBO	IT for this project	Cumulative IT granted to date
West	1,565 acres	0 acres	218.15 acres
Central	2,280 acres	0 acres	118.05 acres
Northeast	4,679 acres	0 acres	342.40 acres
East	6,370 acres	0 acres	207.80 acres
South	7,224 acres	0.05 acres	927.66 acres
Statewide	22,118 acres	0.05 acres	1814.03 acres

We determined that this level of anticipated and exempted take of Indiana bats from the proposed project, in conjunction with the other actions taken by ODOT pursuant to the PBO to date, is *not likely to result in jeopardy* to the species.

We understand that ODOT is implementing all pertinent Indiana bat conservation measures, specifically A-1 and M-6 stipulated in the Biological Assessment on pages 29-31. In addition, ODOT is monitoring the extent of incidental take that occurs on a project-by-project basis. These measures will minimize the impact of the anticipated incidental take.

This fulfills your section 7(a)(2) requirements for this action. However, should the proposed project be modified or the level of take identified above be exceeded, ODOT should promptly reinstate consultation as outlined in 50 CFR §402.16. As provided in 50 CFR §402.16, reinstatement of formal consultation is required where discretionary Federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained (or is authorized by law) and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; (2) new information reveals effects of the continued implementation of ODOT's Statewide Transportation Program and projects predicated upon it may affect listed species in a manner or to an extent not considered in this opinion; (3) the continued implementation of ODOT's Statewide Transportation Program and projects predicated upon it are subsequently modified in a manner that cause an effect to federally listed species not considered in this opinion; or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action. In instances where the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded, any operations causing such take must cease, pending reinstatement. Requests for reinstatement, or questions regarding reinstatement, should be directed to the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service's Columbus, Ohio Field Office.

We appreciate your continued efforts to ensure that this project is consistent with all provisions outlined in the Biological Assessment and PBO. If you have any questions regarding our response or if you need additional information, please contact Jeromy Applegate at extension 21.

These comments have been prepared under the authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661 et seq.), the Endangered Species Act, of 1973, as amended, and are consistent with the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mitigation Policy.

This concludes consultation on this action as required by section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act. Should, during the term of this action, additional information on listed or proposed species or their critical habitat become available, or if new information reveals effects of the action that were not previously considered, consultation with the Service should be reinstated to assess whether the determinations are still valid. If you have any questions regarding our response or if you need additional information, please contact Jeromy Applegate at extension 21.

Sincerely,


Mary Knapp, Ph.D.
Field Supervisor

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