

Dear Interested Party:

After a thorough review of the best available science, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to delist the interior least tern, removing the tern from the List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife. When the interior least tern was first listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1985, there were fewer than 2,000 birds and only a few dozen nesting sites scattered across a once-expansive range that covered America's Great Plains and Lower Mississippi Valley. Today there are more than 18,000 interior least terns at more than 480 nesting sites in 18 states, thanks to decades of innovative conservation efforts and diverse partnerships among local, state and federal stakeholders. States where tern colonies now occur are Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas.

The interior least tern's five-year review is available here:

[https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five\\_year\\_review/doc4294.pdf](https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five_year_review/doc4294.pdf)

In 2005, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) coordinated a range-wide monitoring event, which confirmed that tern populations were increasing over the previous two decades. The Corps also funded, with the assistance of the Service, the development of a habitat-driven, range-wide population model for the species. This complex model, developed with the American Bird Conservancy, considers interior least tern status and population dynamics with and without continued management at local, regional, and range-wide scales across a 30-year period.

Federal and state agencies and industrial partners have all contributed to the interior least tern's successful recovery. Depending upon local conditions and needs, active habitat management has included: monitoring, protection of nesting areas, improved water flows, dredge material placement, vegetation and predator control. Many of these beneficial activities have become standard practices and are anticipated to continue after delisting. In addition to post-delisting commitments by the Corps, most states and industries with active management and monitoring roles are expected to continue their actions.

The proposed rule and supporting documents, including a draft post-delisting monitoring plan, are available at <http://www.regulations.gov>, Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2018-0082. The Service will seek public review and comments on the proposed rule and draft monitoring plan. Comments are requested within 60 days or by 12/23/2019, and will be accepted by mail or electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter the docket number, and then click on the "Comment Now!" button. Please note that submissions merely supporting or opposing a potential delisting, without supporting documentation, will not be considered in making a determination.

Requests for a public hearing should be made in writing to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Field Office, 6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Jackson, MS, 39216 by 12/09/2019.