

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain-Prairie Region
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**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Takes Initial Steps Forward in
Partnerships for Working Landscapes in the San Luis Valley**

Public Meetings Scheduled on Draft Land Protection Plan (LPP)

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today that it is moving forward with a proposal for a locally-led, voluntary, cooperative partnership with landowners in the San Luis Valley to conserve wildlife habitat and help keep working lands working.

Through June 9, 2012, the Service will hold public meetings and seek input on a draft Land Protection Plan (LPP)/Environmental Assessment (EA) for the conservation initiative in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Through this initiative, the Service would work with willing landowners to acquire perpetual conservation easements for up to 530,000 acres of wetlands, riparian corridors, and important upland habitats. The Service is proposing to begin working on these partnerships in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains, where, because of the stewardship efforts of private landowners, there are opportunities to protect important wildlife migration corridors over federal, state, and private lands. If partnerships in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains are successful and of interest to private landowners, the Service would – at a later date – consider whether to pursue similar partnerships with private landowners in other parts of the proposed San Luis Valley Conservation Area (SLVCA).

"This project represents another opportunity for the Service to partner with the people of the San Luis Valley to protect this important landscape for both wildlife and the people that have worked these lands for generations. By beginning our partnerships in the southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains, we can determine the level of interest among landowners before exploring whether to broaden those partnerships to other partners elsewhere in the Valley. At every step, we want to listen, learn, and do all we can to support the goals and vision of local landowners and the local community," said Steve Guertin, Mountain-Prairie Regional Director.

The LPP addresses conservation goals and the approach the Service will use to determine priority properties considered for partnerships and conservation easements with interested landowners. The associated environmental assessment (EA) details the potential impacts of the proposed federal action. Any potential acquisitions of conservation easements would be from willing sellers.

Contact: *Region 6 External Affairs, Marla Trollan, 303-236-4510 or marla_trollan@fws.gov*

An integral part of this effort is working with a coalition of local governments and other partners to protect riparian corridors used by the southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo by developing a San Luis Valley Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), which is expected to be available in fall 2012. The Service intends for the LPP to complement the land protection objectives of the HCP, which is being developed by locals in pursuit of an incidental take permit. Coordination between partners should result in minimization if not complete avoidance of conflict between the programs.

During the public comment period, the Service will host a series of public meetings in the Valley. During these meetings, the Service will present an overview of the purpose and priorities of the draft LPP, and allow the public to ask questions and make comments about the project.

Public meetings are scheduled as follows:

- May 14, 2012: 6:30-8:00 p.m., Alamosa County Building, 8900 Independence Way, Room 108, Alamosa, Colorado
- May 15, 2012: 6:30-8:00 p.m., Costilla County Commissioner Meeting Room, 352 Main Street, San Luis, Colorado
- May 16, 2012: 6:30-8:00 p.m., Moffat School, 501 Garfield Avenue, Moffat, Colorado

For more information about the Service's partnership work in the San Luis Valley or the SLV Refuge Complex, to view the draft EA/LPP, or to subscribe to the mailing list, please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/planning/lpp/co/slv/slv.html>. Comments will be accepted during the meetings or via letters addressed to: Dr. Mike Dixon, Planning Team Leader, P.O. Box 25486, Denver, CO 80225-0486; or via email to SLVrefugesplanning@fws.gov.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/>. Connect with our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSMountainPrairie>, follow our tweets at <http://twitter.com/USFWSMtnPrairie>, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsmtnpairie/>.

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