

**Peer Review Plan:** Species Status Assessment Report for whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*)

**Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):**

**Draft documents to be disseminated:** July 2018

**Peer review to be initiated:** July 2018

**Peer review to be completed by:** August 2018

**Determination regarding species' status expected:** This report will inform a decision on whether to propose to list the whitebark pine under the Endangered Species Act. This decision is expected in 2019.

**About the Peer Review Process:**

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our Species Status Assessment Report for the whitebark pine.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria.

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with whitebark pine or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the Species Status Assessment Report for the whitebark pine. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the Species Status Assessment Report, and a list of citations as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality,

objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the Species Status Assessment process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the species' needs, biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution of the species accurate?
2. Does the Species Status Assessment Report provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the current and projected future condition of the species?
3. Are our assumptions and definitions of suitable habitat logical and adequate?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in our Species Status Assessment Report?
5. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
6. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations. A decision on whether to propose to list the whitebark pine under the Endangered Species Act is expected in 2019.

### **About Public Participation**

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by July 30, 2018, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the Species Status Assessment process. This Species Status Assessment report will inform the Service's decision on whether to list whitebark pine under the Endangered Species Act. If we determine that the species warrants listing, we will publish a proposed rule to list the species with appropriate opportunities for public review and comment (expected in 2019).

### **Contact**

For more information, contact Kevin Burgess, at 303-236-4262.