

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Mountain-Prairie Region  
134 Union Boulevard  
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

November 29, 2005  
05-85

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### **Environmental Assessment and Proposed Conservation Agreement for Arctic Grayling Available for Public Comment**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the availability of an Environmental Assessment and a proposed conservation agreement to augment ongoing efforts to conserve the fluvial Arctic grayling population in the Upper Big Hole River in southwestern Montana. The Environmental Assessment is in response to an application by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to the Service for an Enhancement of Survival Permit pursuant to section 10 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The agreement, permit application, and Environmental Assessment are available for public comment until January 23, 2006.

The purpose of the conservation agreement, known as a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), is to enable Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks, in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to work with local landowners to protect and enhance Arctic grayling populations by implementing conservation measures such as increasing instream flows, conserving or restoring riparian habitats, removing or mitigating for any man-made barriers to migration, and reducing threats from entrainment in irrigation ditches.

The agreement is intended to facilitate the conservation of Arctic grayling giving the State of Montana and cooperating landowners incentives to implement conservation measures. Participating landowners would receive regulatory certainty concerning land and water use restrictions that might otherwise apply should the Arctic grayling become protected under the ESA.

The Environmental Assessment considers the biological, environmental, and socioeconomic effects of the proposed conservation agreement and issuance of the permit.

The Arctic grayling in the Upper Big Hole River is the last native river-dwelling population in the lower 48 states and has been impacted by recent drought and ongoing habitat degradation. The state of Montana considers this fish a "species of special concern" and the Service has categorized this fish as candidate species for ESA listing since 1994.

Under a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, participating landowners voluntarily implement conservation activities on their properties to benefit species that are

proposed for listing under the ESA, candidate species, or other sensitive species. CCAAs encourage private and other non-Federal property owners to implement conservation efforts and reduce threats to unlisted species by assuring them they will not be subjected to increased property use restrictions if the species should become listed under the ESA.

Persons wishing to review the permit application, the draft Agreement, and the draft Environmental Assessment may obtain a copy on the World Wide Web at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/fish/grayling/grayling.htm>, or by writing the Service's Montana Ecological Services office at: Arctic Grayling CCAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 100 North Park Avenue, Suite 320, Helena, Montana 59601, or by telephone (406-449-5225), electronic mail ([fw6\\_arcticgrayling@fws.gov](mailto:fw6_arcticgrayling@fws.gov)), or facsimile (406-449-5339)

Written data or comments concerning the permit application, the draft Agreement, or the draft Environmental Assessment can be submitted to the above contact information for the Service's Montana Field Office. Comments must be submitted in writing to be considered in the Service's decision-making process.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.