

Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office  
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234  
Reno, NV 89502  
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Phone: 775-861-6300  
Fax: 775-861-6301  
Web Site: [nevada.fws.gov](http://nevada.fws.gov)  
Contact: Robert Williams

## News Release

### **PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT ON DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS FOR PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT OF JARBIDGE BULL TROUT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released an analysis today that estimates costs related to the conservation of the bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and its proposed critical habitat to be \$215,000 per year for the Jarbidge population. Of those costs, 54% are estimated for grazing, 29% for federal and state agency conservation activities, and 17% for transportation improvements.

To view the economic analysis, go to <http://pacific.fws.gov/bulltrout>.

The bull trout is protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as a threatened species. In June of 2004, the Service released its proposal to designate 131 miles of critical habitat for the species in the Jarbidge River area. A final designation is expected this summer.

In releasing the analysis, the Service reopened public comment on its revised critical habitat proposal for the bull trout. The Service will accept public comments on both the critical habitat proposal and the draft economic analysis until June 2, 2005.

Critical habitat is a term used in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

"I encourage the public to review the Draft Economic Analysis and submit comments to us," said Bob Williams, Nevada Field Supervisor. "Comments we receive will help us make the final critical habitat determination."

Areas designated as critical habitat for the bull trout are in the Jarbidge River watershed which is located within Owyhee County in Southwestern Idaho and Elko County in Nevada. Ninety-two percent of the habitat occurs on lands that are federally managed. The State of Idaho manages 3% of the habitat and the remaining 5% is privately owned.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

The East and West forks of the Jarbidge River originate in the Jarbidge Mountains of Northeast Nevada, flowing northward to merge four miles north of the Idaho-Nevada with the main stream of the river. The mainstream of the Jarbidge River flows northwest to its confluence with the Bruneau River, which then flows northward to enter C.J. Strike Reservoir on the Snake River. Bull trout critical habitat is present in the East and West forks of the Jarbidge River, the mainstem Jarbidge River, and six headwater tributaries.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little to additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In most cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including the Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted by June 2, 2005 to: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Branch of Endangered Species, 911 N. E, 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR 97232, or by fax to (503) 231-6243. Copies of the analysis may be obtained at <http://pacific.fws.gov/bulltrout>, or by calling John Young at (503) 231-6194.

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.