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News Release



For Immediate Release
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TAXONOMIC REVISION AND CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR SIERRA NEVADA BIGHORN SHEEP

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), will publish a final rule designating approximately 417,577 acres of land in portions of Tuolumne, Mono, Fresno, Inyo, and Tulare counties in California, for the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis californiana*), a federally listed endangered species in the *Federal Register* on August 5, 2008. The Service will also announce the final revision of taxonomy for the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep from a distinct population segment of California bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis californiana*) to a subspecies, (*Ovis canadensis sierrae*), based on recent published information.

Areas identified as critical habitat for the bighorn sheep include open upland, montane, and alpine habitats with rocky areas along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains from about 4,000 feet to approximately 14,500 feet. Of the designated critical habitat, 416,407 acres occurs on federally managed lands with the remaining 1,005 acres under private ownership, and 165 acres managed by local government.

“Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve,” said Bob Williams, Field Supervisor for the Service’s Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office. “Designation of critical habitat has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require Federal funding or permits. In preparing the final critical habitat designation for Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, we reviewed and considered comments from peer reviewers and the public on the proposed designation and incorporated them into the final rule as appropriate.”

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. 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.

Impacts associated with conservation activities for bighorn sheep are estimated to be approximately \$27.4 million and costs associated solely with the designation of critical habitat are estimated to be

approximately \$149,000 over a 20-year period in areas designated as critical habitat.

The final rule, economic analysis, and maps will be available at <http://www.regulations.gov> and at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada>. Comments and materials received, as well as supporting documentation used in the preparation of this final rule, are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours, at the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234, Reno, Nevada 89523; telephone 775-861-6300; facsimile 775-861-6301. This rule becomes effective September 4, 2008.

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 www.fws.gov.

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