

News Release



Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public comment sought on incidental take permit application for photovoltaic facility in Pahrump

LAS VEGAS — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is opening a 30-day public comment period on an application from Valley Electric Association, Inc., for a 30-year incidental take permit under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). The permit sought by the utility would authorize “take” of the Mojave desert tortoise that could occur during the construction, operation, and maintenance of a solar photovoltaic facility in the town of Pahrump, Nev. The permit application is expected to publish in the *Federal Register* on Friday, September 4, 2015, which marks the beginning of the public comment period.

“Take” is defined under the ESA as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect listed species, or attempt to engage in such conduct. Under specified circumstances, the Service may issue permits that allow the take of federally listed species, provided that the take that occurs is incidental to, but not the purpose of, an otherwise lawful activity.

The permit application includes a proposed low-effect habitat conservation plan (HCP) that incorporates measures the applicant would implement to minimize and mitigate effects of project activities on the desert tortoise. Such measures include only mowing, crushing or trimming existing vegetation instead of the traditional blading and grading of the site, and raising the minimum height of the solar panels. These actions, in addition to other minimization measures, will allow tortoises to remain on the site after construction and help minimize potential impacts to migratory birds. Additionally, the Service has preliminarily determined that approval of the HCP qualifies as a categorical exclusion and does not require preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Written comments on the permit application, proposed low-effect HCP, and draft NEPA compliance documentation must be received no later than 11:59 p.m., on Monday, October 5, 2015.

(More)

Copies of the permit application, proposed low-effect HCP, and draft NEPA compliance documentation are available on the Internet at www.fws.gov/nevada/, www.regulations.gov, or by written request to Jeri Krueger at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reno Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234, Reno, NV 89502, or by telephone at 775-861-6300.

Please address written comments to Michael J. Senn, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 4701 North Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to 702-515-5231. Please note that your information request or comment is in reference to the Valley Electric Association Community Solar Project Low-Effect HCP, Nye County, Nevada.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. Our priority is to make implementation of the ESA less complex, less contentious and more effective. We seek to accelerate recovery of threatened and endangered species across the nation, while making it easier for people to coexist with these species.

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/cno>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#), and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).