



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

For Release June 29, 1989

Elizabeth Lipscomb 202-343-5634

Christine Enright 703-358-2183

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE COMPLETES BIOLOGICAL OPINION ON
EFFECTS OF PESTICIDES ON AQUATIC ENDANGERED SPECIES**

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has forwarded recommendations to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on the use of 112 commonly used pesticides in order to safeguard endangered species.

The recommendations are contained in a formal "biological opinion" requested by EPA under the Endangered Species Act. The report focuses on 165 endangered species, most of which are aquatic, and 112 pesticides registered for four different uses (crops, rangeland, forests, and mosquito larvae) in and around aquatic habitats. Many of the determinations were reevaluations of previous biological opinions using new data made available after the original opinions were completed.

Although the Fish and Wildlife Service report does not recommend banning any of the pesticides, the Service did find that in some cases the rates of application allowed by EPA are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered species, or to result in the loss of individuals of those species. In those instances, the Service has recommended specific alternatives for use of the chemicals to preclude jeopardy to the species and minimize the likelihood of accidental or unintended loss of individuals within the population. These recommendations include, for example, the use of buffer zones around habitat occupied by endangered species; prohibiting the use of pesticides near water sites, caverns, or sinkholes within a certain distance of cave- or aquifer-dwelling species; altering the form in which the chemical is applied, i.e., using a granular rather than a liquid formulation; or altering the method of application, such as switching from aerial to ground application.

(over)

"The recommendations made in this opinion represent a major step in our efforts to protect endangered species from potentially harmful uses of pesticides while at the same time permitting the continued production of our national food supply, much of which depends on the use of these chemicals," said Steve Robinson, Acting Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. "We will continue to work closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Agriculture as EPA implements this very important pesticide program."

The biological opinion was requested in September 1988 by EPA, which is responsible for regulating the registration and use of pesticides. Under the Endangered Species Act, EPA is required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions that it determines may affect an endangered species. This biological opinion is the result of this consultation process.

The biological opinion produced by the Fish and Wildlife Service will form the backbone of the initial endangered species conservation measures adopted for use in EPA's pesticide labeling program.

Through implementation of this biological opinion, pesticide users who fully comply with the guidelines provided will be relieved of liability under the Endangered Species Act. Even if pesticide use as prescribed in the opinion results in unintended loss of endangered species ("incidental take"), the pesticide user would not be held personally responsible. However, if incidental take exceeds the prescribed level for the species, consultation between EPA and the Service would be reinitiated.

Some of the more common aquatic endangered species in the study are species of freshwater pearly mussel, trout, and chub. Of the pesticides reviewed, diazinon and malathion are among the most well known.

In addition to an evaluation of pesticides affecting aquatic species, the opinion evaluates pesticide use in areas that may affect several plant species; a number of bird species, including the least Bell's vireo and the California least tern; species of plants or animals occurring solely or largely on Federal lands; and alternatives for the red-cockaded woodpecker and the wood stork.

Copies of the biological opinion will be made available by EPA (703-557-2805) for public review.