

News Release



Department of the Interior
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Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan Documents Available for Public Review

Comments will be accepted until November 1, 2010

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is making available for public review documents related to a proposed Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan for several rare species inhabiting Oregon's Willamette Valley. Prairies in this region are among the most endangered ecosystems in the United States, with less than one percent of these valuable habitats remaining.

Benton County, located between the central coast of Oregon and the Cascade Mountains, has worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service over the last few years to develop the Habitat Conservation Plan. It addresses the potential impacts of certain county activities on two butterflies and five plants; including five species listed under the Endangered Species Act. These include:

- The endangered Fender's blue butterfly;
- The Taylor's checkerspot butterfly (a candidate for listing);
- The threatened Kincaid's lupine and Nelson's checkermallow;
- The endangered Willamette daisy and Bradshaw's lomatium; and
- The peacock larkspur, a species of concern in the State of Oregon.

"We commend Benton County for working with us proactively to develop this Habitat Conservation Plan," said Paul Henson, State Supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office. "This plan provides for endangered species conservation while offering regulatory certainty as the county carries out its responsibilities to deliver safe and viable public services."

A Habitat Conservation Plan is required for Benton County to receive an "incidental take" permit for occasions when certain activities inadvertently disturb or harm the above listed species. The Fish and Wildlife Service approves such permits when the applicant develops measures to monitor, minimize, and mitigate for incidental take and support species' overall recovery. All of those measures are rolled up into a Habitat Conservation Plan, which forms the basis of the permit application.

Covering nearly 19,000 acres, including parks, open space, and natural areas, the Habitat Conservation Plan addresses potential impacts to the above species that could result from county road maintenance, utilities construction, water system management, permitting of private construction activity, and prairie habitat

management. The plan also includes the potential for private landowners to benefit from regulatory assurances from the Fish and Wildlife Service in return for the conservation measures outlined.

Benton County already has benefitted from a great deal of public input in the process of developing the Habitat Conservation Plan, having hosted seven public meetings throughout the county over the last four years. The county will host another public meeting from 7:00-9:00 p.m. on October 12 in Corvallis to provide more information about the plan. The meeting will be held in the Walnut Community Room of the Scott Zimbrick Memorial Fire Station No. 5, off of Walnut Boulevard just south of Martin Luther King Park. Benton County also has posted information at www.co.benton.or.us.

Before the Fish and Wildlife Service can approve the permit, the agency is required to seek public review and comment on its own Environmental Assessment, analyzing the effects of the plan and permit on the environment, people, and area economies.

Documents available for public review until November 1, 2010 include:

- The proposed Habitat Conservation Plan;
- A proposed “Implementing Agreement” explaining the ways the plan would be carried out; and
- The Fish and Wildlife Service’s draft Environmental Assessment of the proposed plan. This assessment was published in today’s *Federal Register*.

All of these documents are available for public review and comment by visiting www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/ToolsForLandowners/HabitatConservationPlans/#HCP. This link also provides access to the *Federal Register* notice about the availability of the above documents, and information on how to submit comments, including through email at OFWocomment@fws.gov.

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