



News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Draft Economic Analysis of Conservation Action to Protect Endangered Rota Bird Released

Comment Period for Critical Habitat Designation Also Reopened

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of the Rota bridled white-eye on the island of Rota and its proposed critical habitat at between \$806,000 and nearly \$4.5 million over the next 20 years. In releasing the analysis, the Service also reopened the public comment period on a proposal of critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye. The Service will accept public comments until June 5th.

The Rota bridled white-eye, a small yellowish bird of the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, is protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as an endangered species. On September 14, 2005, the Service published in the *Federal Register* its proposal to designate 3,958 acres of critical habitat for the species.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. However, 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.

Areas proposed as critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye consist of native limestone forest and nonnative forest. The proposed designation consists of 3,700 acres (94 percent) of government land under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and 258 acres (6 percent) of private land. Of this, approximately 1,225 acres overlap with existing critical habitat designated for the Mariana crow in 2004.

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.

Estimated total costs for the designation range from \$806,000 to \$4,465,000 or an annual value of \$76,000 to \$421,000. Approximately 15 percent of these costs are associated with public land management activities, such as species and habitat research and habitat

conservation plan development costs. The remaining 85 percent is the economic value of forgone future development of agricultural homesteads in the designation.

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

In almost all 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 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.

The Rota bridled white-eye is a small (approximately 4 inches in size) yellowish bird with a yellow-orange bill, legs, and feet. Average weight of the bird is about one-third of an ounce. The species feeds primarily on insects and often is found in small flocks of five to seven birds. Related species include the Guam bridled white-eye, which is believed to be extinct, and the Saipan bridled white-eye, which is relatively abundant on Saipan, Tinian, and Aguigan.

The notice of availability of the draft economic analysis was published in today's *Federal Register*. The complete report and the proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye are available at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. Copies may also be obtained by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808 792 9400.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received by June 5, 2006. Comments may be sent via the Internet to RBWE_CritHab@fws.gov. Please include "Attn: RIN 1018-AU32" in your subject header and your name and return address in the body of the message. Comments and information may also be mailed or faxed to Patrick Leonard, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850 (Fax 808 792 9581).

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 nearly 100-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.