

SNAKE RIVER FISH AND WILDLIFE OFFICE
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PROPOSED LOW-EFFECT HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW
Impacts to Northern Idaho Squirrels Addressed in Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced publication today a Notice of Availability (NOA) of a proposed Low-effect Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), incidental take permit application, and draft Environmental Action Statement (EAS) for a residential site in Adams County, Idaho.

The Service is requesting public review and comment on the application and the proposed HCP and EAS. A 30-day comment period has been established, ending on November 17, 2006.

The proposed HCP covers the development of a 5-acre private residence in Price Valley, owned by Duane and Darlene Schwisow. Price Valley supports one of the more robust populations of the northern Idaho ground squirrel, a species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (Act). Current population estimates for the Price Valley complex, which includes the applicant's property and adjacent state and private land, is upwards of 150 ground squirrels. Small, disjunct populations of the species occur along Price Valley Road.

The proposed HCP would provide an incidental take permit covering activities such as leveling the residence pad, construction of a private residence, excavation for a septic system, and the installation of utility lines and a well. All activities would occur in suitable but unoccupied habitat for the northern Idaho ground squirrel.

“Take” of a federally-listed species is defined under the Act as to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or engage in such conduct.” The Service may, under limited circumstances, issue permits authorizing “incidental take” of listed species, which is defined as “take” that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, carrying out an otherwise lawful activity.

A key provision of the applicants’ proposed HCP and 25-year permit is the development and implementation of a habitat management plan to avoid and minimize incidental take of the northern Idaho ground squirrel, as well as mitigation for impacts to the species and its habitat from the development actions. One measure includes avoidance of all ground-disturbing activity in a three-acre protected area. To mitigate for the temporary loss of suitable habitat due to certain development activities, the applicants will replant temporarily disturbed areas with native plants.

Jeff Foss, Field Supervisor of the Service’s Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office said, “We have worked closely with other federal agencies and private citizens in Adams and Valley counties on the protection of the northern Idaho ground squirrel, and the species has benefited greatly from such collaboration. The Service encourages the public to review this proposed HCP for actions that will impact the species, and submit comments to us during the comment period.”

The documents are available for inspection during business hours at the Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office at the above address, or a request may be made for the documents to be mailed by phoning (208) 378-5243. The documents can also be found at <http://idahoes.fws.gov>.

Comments on the permit application, proposed HCP, and draft EAS should be submitted by close of business on November 17, 2006. Comments may be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Boise, Idaho 83709; fax (208) 378-5262; telephone (208) 378-5243. Electronic comment may be e-mailed to fw1srbocomment@fws.gov. Please include "Schwisow HCP Comments" in the subject line for faxes and e-mails. If our Internet connection is disrupted, please submit your comments by mail or fax.

Comments on this proposal are of public record. Individual respondents may request that the Service withhold home addresses from the official public record, which the Service will honor to the extent allowable by law. There may also be circumstances in which a respondent's identity is withheld from the record by law. If you wish the Service to withhold a name or address, it must be stated prominently at the beginning of the comment. Anonymous comments will not be considered. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses are available for inspection in their entirety.

For more information, please contact Jeri Wood at (208) 378-5243.

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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 95millionacre 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 resource 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.

For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our homepage at <http://www.fws.gov>