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Subject: FWS Weekly Report - February 24, 2021
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Attachments: [FWS Weekly 2021-02-24.docx](#)

Here is the HQ Weekly Report. I've highlighted several items below that might be of interest to our region.

Week Ahead Schedule of Meetings, Hearings, and Travel

*note: the asterisks * are added by FWS HQ or FWP to indicate that those items present communications opportunities and/or require engagement from Department leadership.*

ASFWP: Shannon Estenoz, teleworking; Judy Fong, teleworking
FWS: Martha Williams, teleworking; Caroline Welles, teleworking

Upcoming Bureau Priority Communications

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

None to report.

Grants, Financial Awards, and Contracts

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- ***On February 25**, FWS plans to notify the states, territories and the District of Columbia of the FY 2021 apportionment of funds under the provisions of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act (PRDJ). Wildlife Restoration funds totaled \$678,894,449 and can be used by the states for projects to restore, conserve, manage, and enhance wild birds and mammals, and their habitat. Projects also include providing public use and access to wildlife resources, hunter education, and development and management of shooting ranges. Sport Fish Restoration funds totaled \$414,260,452 and can be used for fishery projects, boating access, and aquatic education. A communications strategy, news release and social media posts will support this announcement. (Updated 02/24/2021)
- ***On February 26**, FWS will notify states, territories and the District of Columbia of the FY 2021 apportionment of funds for the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG). State Wildlife Grant funds totaled \$55,508,169 and can be used by the states for developing and implementing programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats, including species that are not hunted or fished. A communications strategy, news release and social media

posts will support the announcement. (Updated 02/24/2021)

- In early March, the FY 2021 Tribal Wildlife Grants (TWG) Program Notice of Funding Opportunity is expected to open and will be available in Grants.gov. In FY 2021, Congress appropriated \$6 million to fund TWG. Since its inception in 2003, TWG has awarded more than \$99 million to Federally recognized Tribes supporting 538 conservation projects throughout Indian Country. These projects have benefited a wide range of fish, wildlife, and habitat, including species of Native American cultural or traditional importance and species that are not hunted or fished. (Updated 02/17/2021)

Week Ahead Announcements and Actions (February 24-March 7)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

NEW ITEMS

- In late February or early March, Mexico will announce the eastern monarch butterfly overwintering population estimate. Each winter, the World Wildlife Fund, Mexico, and the Mexican National Commission of Protected Areas monitor the eastern monarch population in Mexico and estimate the population by measuring the total area occupied by monarchs in the overwintering ground. Although varying year-to-year, monarchs consistently numbered in the hundreds of millions throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (assuming a 21.1 million monarch/hectare density). Last year's estimate (2019-2020) butterflies occupied approximately 2.83 hectares (6.99 acres). This represents a 53.22 percent decrease from the previous year, which was 6.05 hectares. Multiple factors contribute to the long-term decline, including habitat loss and degradation in overwintering sites and breeding areas, pesticides, disease and the effects of a changing climate. FWS is not planning outreach. (02/24/2021)
- On or around February 25, FWS plans to issue KGHM Polska Miedz, doing business as Robinson Nevada Mining Company, a 30-year incidental eagle take permit. The permit application covers the reoccurring loss of breeding productivity at one golden eagle territory at the Robinson Mine due to disturbance from operational activities at the facility. Authorization is for reoccurring loss of breeding productivity at one eagle territory equating to an estimated loss of 0.59 young fledged per year. In addition, all currently known nests for this eagle territory will be removed, outside of the breeding season. The applicant submitted an eagle management plan with their application, which details how they propose to avoid, minimize, and mitigate for adverse effects to

eagles. Compensatory mitigation is proposed to offset unavoidable eagle take by retrofitting power poles, which reduces ongoing fatalities of eagles due to electrocution. This is not controversial and if-asked talking points will be available. (02/24/2021)

- By March 1, FWS must submit a *Draft Plan to Release Captive Red Wolves into the North Carolina Non-Essential Experimental Population* in response to a court-ordered injunction issued on January 21, 2021 (Red Wolf Coalition et al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). FWS is working on talking points and statement for clearance. (02/24/2021)
- * On March 3, World Wildlife Day, the Garoua Wildlife College in Cameroon, will launch a curriculum focused on human rights for conservation practitioners in Africa. The curriculum was developed through a partnership with FWS and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), funded through the US Agency for International Development. Since 2011, FWS and Garoua Wildlife College have worked together to integrate emerging wildlife conservation issues into the college curriculum. Garoua Wildlife College will host a small ceremony with the launch of the curriculum and USFS and FWS plan to issue a news release in conjunction with the event. Communications strategies and social media posts will accompany the news release and event. (02/24/2021)
- On or around March 3, FWS will post a final Environmental Assessment (EA) and FONSI associated with issuance of a scientific collecting permit to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for the take of common ravens in Baker County, Oregon. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act allows FWS to authorize the take of migratory birds if that take is compatible with the long-term conservation of the species being taken. Common ravens are predators of sage-grouse nests; the experiment being proposed by ODFW is to examine the effects of removing raven nests and possibly adult ravens to study the effects on greater sage-grouse in Baker County. Tribes and local interested parties will be notified directly by email. FWS is not planning a news release. This is controversial due to reactions against the action by the public and some local organizations. (02/24/2021)
- On or around March 3, FWS will post a Finding of No Significant Impact and Final Environmental Assessment to the regional website in response to an application from the City of San José for a two-year incidental eagle take permit, pursuant to the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The application requests authorization of disturbance to, and loss of breeding productivity of, one golden eagle breeding pair during the 2021 and 2022 eagle breeding seasons from construction activities related to the San Jose Headworks Improvements and New Headworks Project. FWS concludes there will be no

significant impact to the human environment of issuing a permit authorizing this take, as described in the FONSI. The applicant would implement measures to minimize adverse effects to eagles and would provide compensatory. This is not controversial. and if-asked talking points will be available. (02/24/2021)

- On March 5, the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) and the Deepwater Horizon Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (TIG) will release a draft restoration plan (Draft Phase II Restoration Plan #3.2: Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion). A 60-day public comment period will follow. At the same time, the U.S Army Corps of Engineers will release a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project. The EIS will be used to inform the Corps decision regarding the permit application the CPRA has submitted for the diversion. The comment period for the draft EIS will run concurrently with the comment period for the draft restoration plan. The Corps and LA TIG/CPRA will host virtual public meetings in early April 2021. (02/24/2021)

UPDATED ITEMS

- On February 26, FWS will publish in the *Federal Register* a proposed rule for the subsistence harvest of migratory birds in Alaska during the spring and summer of 2021. The proposed rule will be made available for public comment for 30 days. The proposed regulations were developed by the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, which include representatives of Alaska Native peoples, FWS, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The proposed rule addresses management of the subsistence migratory bird harvest in Alaska. A news release will be distributed to media outlets that serve communities that would be affected by the proposed changes to the regulations. In addition, tribes will be offered the opportunity to consult on the proposed rule. The rule will post online February 25. (Updated_02/24/2021)
- On or around March 8, FWS will post a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) associated with issuance of an eagle take permit for the incidental take of bald and golden eagles at the Marengo I and II Wind projects in Columbia County, Washington. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act allows FWS to authorize the take of bald and golden eagles if that take is incidental to actions that are otherwise lawful. The draft EA will be available for public comment for 30 days from the posting date. Tribes and local interested parties will be notified directly by email. For EAs on eagle take, FWS posts the EA on a regional website, and extends a notification to stakeholders and has if-asked talking points available. This is not controversial. (Updated 02/24/2021)

- *** In early March, FWS will publish a technical report titled *Bald Eagle Population Size: 2020 Update*, which documents that the bald eagle population in the contiguous United States has more than quadrupled since 2016.** This report is a technical update of the scientific information for bald eagles published in FWS's Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Eagle Rule Revision (PEIS), which was finalized in December 2016. In the PEIS, FWS committed to updating population size estimates for both bald and golden eagles no less than once every six years. This report fulfills that commitment for bald eagles. The population size estimate for golden eagles is not yet complete. In addition, there will be a subsequent report in the spring of 2021 using the updated bald eagle population estimates to determine what the allowable level of "take" of the eagles will be, as part of the permitting process under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. A national news release, media call, and congressional outreach is planned to celebrate this conservation success story. (Updated 02/24/2021)

ONGOING ITEMS

- **From February 23-27, FWS will be one of the sponsors of the Taking Nature Black 2021 virtual conference.** The theme is Call and Response: Elevating our Stories, Naturally! FWS's Victoria Owens, Special Agent in Charge of the Investigations Unit in the Office of Law Enforcement, is a featured panelist. (02/17/2021)
- *In late February, FWS and the Texas Department of Transportation will issue a joint news release on the Texas Department of Transportation's enrollment in the nationwide Monarch Butterfly Candidate Conservation Agreement for Energy and Transportation Lands administered by the University of Illinois-Chicago FWS. The release will be sent out statewide in Texas. (02/17/2021)
- In late February, FWS plans to make available for public comment a draft environmental assessment (EA) that analyzes the risk of bald and golden eagle incidental take associated with operation of the Glenrock Rolling Hills Project in Converse County, Wyoming. Pacific Power/Rocky Mountain Power is requesting a 30-year Incidental Eagle Take Permit (IETP) for the take of bald and golden eagles, pursuant to the 2016 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act regulations. As part of their application, the applicant prepared an Eagle Conservation Plan. Despite the implementation of avoidance and minimization measures as part of the original project design, since the 158-turbine project became operational in 2009, 38 golden eagles and one bald eagle have been killed. On December 19, 2014, the applicant pleaded guilty in District Court to two counts of Unlawful Take of Migratory Birds, resulting in fines, restitution, and

community service, as well as required implementation of a Migratory Bird Compliance Plan (MBCP). As part of the plea agreement, as long as the applicant implements the MBCP and diligently pursues obtaining the IETP, the government would extend its “non-prosecution” agreement under the Eagle Act. For EAs on eagle take, FWS posts the EA on a regional website, and extends a notification to stakeholders and has if-asked talking points available. (02/03/2021)

- In late February, FWS is expected to authorize the Lost Trail Conservation Area in northwest Montana. FWS has prepared a final environmental assessment (EA) and land protection plan (LPP) outlining a proposal for the Lost Trail Conservation Area. FWS received 30 public comments on the draft EA and LPP during the 30-day public review period that ended on October 15. These largely supportive public comments helped FWS clarify and refine language regarding rare plants, mineral rights, and what rights are included when an easement is purchased. No significant changes have been made to the proposed action identified in the EA. The proposed conservation area would enable FWS to work with willing sellers to protect up to 100,000 acres with conservation easements that integrate landscape-level conservation efforts by FWS and a wide range of partners. The project would protect crucial wildlife habitat and migration corridors for grizzly bears and Canada lynx, secure public access, and allow sustainable timber harvest on these lands in perpetuity. Outreach will include a regional news release, (Updated 01/28/2021)
- *On March 1, (anticipated), the journal Conservation Biology will publish an analysis finding that northern long-eared, little brown and tricolored bat colonies affected by white-nose syndrome (WNS) have declined by greater than 90 percent. The paper's authors include the FWS white-nose syndrome coordinator and assistant coordinator, three additional FWS biologists including the Indiana bat lead, along with U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Bat Conservation International (BCI), and several state and provincial agency biologists. The research tapped into the most comprehensive dataset on hibernating bat populations to date, which was compiled through the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat), established by FWS and USGS to improve bat conservation. FWS leads the national multi-agency response to WNS, supporting data management, coordinating among partners, and awarding grants that further disease research and solutions -- including a recent national prize challenge for novel, innovative solutions that could help permanently eradicate, weaken, or disarm the fungus that causes the disease. FWS, USGS, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and BCI have developed a joint news release to share with targeted news media, congressional staff, and partners. (02/17/2021)

- On or around March 3, FWS will post a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) associated with issuance of an eagle take permit for the incidental take of bald and golden eagles at the Goodnoe Hills Wind project in Klickitat County, Washington. The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act allows FWS to authorize the take of bald and golden eagles if that take is incidental to actions that are otherwise lawful. The draft EA will be available for public comment for 30 days from the posting date. Tribes and local interested parties will be notified directly by email. For EAs on eagle take, FWS posts the EA on a regional website, and extends a notification to stakeholders and has if-asked talking points available. This is not expected to be controversial. (02/17/2021)
- During early March, the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee (ACRCC) anticipates releasing the 2021 Asian Carp Action Plan. FWS, as co-chair of the ACRCC along with EPA, has worked with partners to develop the twelfth edition of the Asian Carp Action Plan. The new plan builds on previous ACRCC efforts to protect the Great Lakes from Asian carp and supports new key and continuing initiatives. These include targeted capture and removal of Asian carp in the Illinois River; testing new fish deterrent technologies; early detection and contingency response; closure of interbasin aquatic invasive species pathways; and support for state-led grass carp control efforts in Lake Erie. Outreach for the action plan will include a short announcement post along with the action plan to the ACRCC's website, asiancarp.us. As has been done in past years, a link to the web-posting will be emailed to Great Lakes congressional offices and NGO partners. (Updated 02/17/2021)

Endangered Species Act Actions through March 23 (for full details see table in attached file)

- Northern spotted owl, Critical Habitat – 1st extension of effective date, Pending Exec-Sec clearance
- Northern spotted owl, Critical Habitat – 2nd extension of effective date, Pending Exec-Sec clearance
- San Clemente Island species, Proposed Delisting, Pending FWS Director clearance
- California condor, Final 10j, Pending FWS Director clearance
- Water howellia, Final Delisting, Pending FWS Director clearance
- Shasta snow-wreath, three-corner milkvetch Batched 90-day Petition Findings, Pending FWS Director clearance
- Franklin's bumblebee, Final Listing, Pending AES clearance

30+ Day Look Ahead (March 8 – March 26)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

NEW ITEMS

- During the week of March 8, FWS, New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, and Arizona Game & Fish Department will jointly announce the results of the 2020 Mexican wolf count, which was completed in February. The count is an annual operation conducted by the Mexican Wolf Interagency Field Team (IFT), a task force comprising federal, state, tribal and international partners. From November 2020 through January 2021, the team conducted ground counts in Arizona and New Mexico that concluded with aerial counts of Mexican wolves in January and February. The announcement will provide an update on the minimum number of wolves, packs, and pups in the wild in 2020. Outreach will include a regional news release with congressional and stakeholder notifications as well as updates on social media. (02/24/2021)
- On March 8, Wendi Weber, FWS North Atlantic-Appalachian Regional Director, will provide opening remarks virtually to members of the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed to kick off their annual Hill Week. RD Weber will provide an overview of the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act and successes of the program to date. Other invited keynote speakers include Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) and Senator Chris Coons (D-DE). (02/24/2021)
- In mid-March, FWS intends to publish in the *Federal Register* a notice of availability for a draft environmental assessment and habitat conservation plan for mining activities by Hanson Materials Services, in Will County, Illinois. The draft HCP accompanies an Endangered Species Act permit application by Hanson for limited, unintentional take of the endangered Hine's emerald dragonfly and two species of concern as a result of normal mining and associated activities. The HCP outlines measures the company would take for long-term conservation of the dragonfly, along with Blanding's turtle and spotted turtle, if FWS approves the permit. The notice of availability will open a 30-day public comment period. Outreach will include a local news release. (02/24/2021)
- In mid-March the final rule for the Subsistence Taking of Fish on Federal Public Lands in Alaska is expected to publish in the *Federal Register*. The rule reflects changes to federal subsistence fisheries regulations adopted by the Federal Subsistence Board during their January 2021 public regulatory meeting. The publication of this rule is routine and not controversial. The publication of this rule will be announced to the public through Facebook, a news release, and a ListServ. (02/24/2021)

* By March 31, FWS will finalize a five-year status review for the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) in the lower-48 states to comply with a court-approved settlement agreement. The last five-year status review for grizzly bears in the lower-48 states was completed in 2011. FWS solicited data for this five-year status review, and the associated Species Status Assessment (SSA) report, from interested parties. FWS sought peer review and review from partners on the SSA report. Based on the best available information, the five-year status review will recommend no change in status for threatened grizzly bears in the lower-48 states. Five-year status reviews are not published in the *Federal Register*; the Regional Director of Interior Regions 5 and 7 will sign the completed status review and it will be posted on the Regional website. A communications plan and news release will be developed. (02/24/2021)

UPDATED ITEMS

- By March 9, FWS will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Town of Chatham for managing fishery resources in the disputed western boundary of the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge. The disputed boundary issue has garnered significant interest from Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Congressman William Keating (D-9-MA) in the past, including legislation introduced in the last two congressional sessions to change the boundary. FWS has a strong legal case for the boundary, supported by solicitor review. The MOU is a positive solution toward continuing collaborative work between the town and refuge and is supported by the senator and congressman. The MOU is also supported by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and regional and national environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Audubon Society and National Wildlife Refuge Association). FWS and the town are planning a joint news release and will coordinate with congressional offices and stakeholders. (Updated 02/24/2021)

ONGOING ITEMS

- Between March 1 and April 17, FWS will complete a reinitiated Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Jordan Cove Energy Project, based on significant modifications to the project route by FERC and the applicant (Pembina). The project entails development of a liquid natural gas shipping terminal in Coos Bay, Oregon, and a 230-mile pipeline across private and federal lands in southwestern Oregon. FWS determined this would adversely impact western snowy plover, Pacific fisher, Pacific (California) marten, several listed plant species, northern spotted owl, and marbled murrelet. Although impacts to the latter two species would be substantial, this project will not likely jeopardize any species. This project is highly contentious within Oregon due to substantial environmental and economic impacts. The BiOp will be publicly available on

a FWS webpage, but no proactive outreach is planned. State and other federal permitting requirements have not yet been met. (02/17/2021)

- *On March 11, FWS will announce the recipients of the 2020 Science Awards during the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. FWS's annual Science Awards shine a spotlight on the scientists and technical staff who demonstrate outstanding leadership, integrity and dedication to upholding FWS's highest standards of scientific excellence in their work. Due to the conference being virtual, the awards ceremony will be pre-recorded. Internal comms are planned. (02/10/2021)
- *On or after March 26, FWS intends to publish in the *Federal Register* a Notice of Availability for a draft management plan and draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address recent declines in California bighorn sheep on Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in south-central Oregon. An EIS review team briefing will be scheduled for mid-March. Since 2017, the bighorn sheep population on the refuge has declined 67 percent to a potentially unsustainable population level and is at risk of extirpation without management intervention. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is a cooperating agency on this project. Outreach will include a news release and Congressional notifications. Portions of the draft management plan and draft EIS will be controversial. (Updated 02/17/2021)
- *During the first quarter of 2021, FWS plans to convene the Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize Boards to begin the initial work to "select a topic" and "issue a problem statement." The appointment package is working its way through FWP, the White House and the Secretary's Office. The Director surnamed the package on January 30. The Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize Advisory Council and boards were established under 2019's John D. Dingell, Jr., Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act and 2020's America's Conservation Enhancement Act. The council will advise the Secretary of the Interior regarding the six Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize competitions. The council is regulated by the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The prize competitions encourage technological innovation with the potential to advance the mission of FWS in the following areas of concern: 1) preventing wildlife poaching and trafficking, 2) promoting wildlife conservation, 3) managing invasive species, 4) protecting endangered species, 5) managing nonlethal human-wildlife conflict, and 6) reducing human-predator conflict. The enabling legislation calls for annual cash prizes up to \$100,000, for each of the six competitions. (02/17/2021)