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Subject: FWS Weekly Report - March 3, 2021
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Attachments: [FWS Weekly 2021-03-03.docx](#)

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

March 3, 2021 - 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

- 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 conservations 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 (March 3-14)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

NEW ITEMS

None to report.

UPDATED ITEMS

- *In early March, 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. (Updated 03/03/2021)

- ***During the week of March 8, (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. (Updated 03/03/2021)
- On March 10, 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 03/03/2021)
- *** In mid-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 03/03/2021)

ONGOING ITEMS

- 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)
- 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)
- 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 12th 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)

- 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)
- ***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)
- 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)

Endangered Species Act Actions through March 30: (for full details see table in attached file)

- San Clemente Island species, Proposed Delisting, **Pending FWP** clearance
- Water howellia, Final Delisting, **Pending FWP** clearance
- California condor, Final 10j, **Pending FWP** clearance
- Shasta snow-wreath, three-corner milkvetch Batched 90-day Petition Findings, **Pending FWP** clearance
- Sierra Nevada Red Fox Final listing, **Pending AES** clearance

30+ Day Look Ahead (March 15 – April 2)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

NEW ITEMS

- On or around March 20, FWS is expecting to publish a notice of availability for a low-effect small-scale single landowner draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and associated NEPA documents to the Federal Register. This HCP addresses take of the threatened Yelm subspecies of the Mazama pocket gopher. Proposed covered activities would include the construction of a single-family home within a 0.33-acre development area in Thurston County, WA. Outreach will include landowner and stakeholder notifications, and posting materials to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Office website. No congressional or media outreach planned. This item is not controversial. (2/24/21)

UPDATED ITEMS

- In March, 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 03/03/2021)

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 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)
- 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)

- *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)