



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

Southern and Central California Coast

Frequently Asked Questions

Public Input Sought for Environmental Analysis of Proposed General Conservation Plan for Oil and Gas Activities in Santa Barbara County

Q. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

A. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is seeking input from the public to identify potential issues and concerns, potential impacts, and possible alternatives to be considered in an environmental review for a proposed General Conservation Plan for oil and gas activities in Santa Barbara County. The Service will accept written comments during a 30-day public scoping period to assist in determining whether an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is appropriate based on the complexity of issues identified during and following the scoping period.

Q. What is the proposed General Conservation Plan for oil and gas activities in Santa Barbara County?

A. The proposed General Conservation Plan is a collaborative and comprehensive strategy that will allow the Service to work more efficiently and effectively with project proponents to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Through this collaborative approach, the Service will work with oil and gas companies to implement conservation measures that minimize and mitigate for take of California tiger salamander and the California red-legged frog, and their habitats, and impacts to Lompoc yerba santa.

Q. Why is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service working on a proposed General Conservation Plan for oil and gas activities in Santa Barbara County?

A. The Service's mission is to protect and conserve fish, wildlife, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service recognizes that actions associated with oil and gas activities may impact federally-listed species. The Service works with project proponents to avoid, minimize, and mitigate for impacts to threatened and endangered species and their habitats under the ESA. When appropriate, the Service issues incidental take permits to applicants who meet issuance criteria pursuant to the ESA. The proposed General Conservation Plan is intended to provide a more efficient mechanism for the permitting process required for issuance of an incidental take permit under Section 10 (a) (1) (B) of the ESA, while at the same time achieving more effective conservation for the species covered under the plan.

The Service only issues permits to authorize incidental take resulting from activities which are otherwise lawful. Project proponents seeking a permit under the proposed General Conservation Plan must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local statutes and regulations. This

proposed plan would not circumvent the need for project compliance with other permit requirements for oil and gas projects or other required approval processes that may include county hearings and local approval.

Q. How will this plan help conserve federally-listed species?

A. This plan allows the Service to take a comprehensive analysis of oil and gas activities in Santa Barbara County and ensure conservation is being implemented in a way that aids recovery of the species. This will allow the Service to take a more proactive, strategic, landscape-level approach to conservation in Santa Barbara County rather than a reactive, project-by-project approach.

Q. What species are covered by the plan?

A. The General Conservation Plan would cover the federally endangered California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*), Santa Barbara distinct population segment, federally threatened California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*), and the federally endangered Lompoc yerba santa (*Eriodictyon capitatum*).

Q. What areas and activities are covered in the proposed General Conservation Plan?

A. The proposed plan is focused on exploration, development, extraction, transport, and distribution of crude oil, natural gas, and petroleum products within Santa Barbara County, California.

Q. What is the length of the proposed General Conservation Plan?

A. Permits can be issued under the General Conservation Plan for up to 20 years after the plan becomes effective. Each individual project permitted under the proposed General Conservation Plan will have variable permit length. The individual permits issued under this plan will be valid for the entire permit length so long as the amount of take issued under the permit is not exceeded.

Q. Who is the proposed General Conservation Plan intended for?

The proposed General Conservation Plan is intended for proponents engaged in geophysical exploration, development, extraction, transport, and/or distribution of crude oil, natural gas, and/or other petroleum products, and maintenance, operation, repair, and decommissioning of oil and gas pipelines and well field infrastructure in Santa Barbara County. Participation in the proposed General Conservation Plan would be voluntary.

Q. Will oil and gas activities still be regulated by the California Environmental Quality Act and other local government (e.g., county)?

A. Yes. This plan will not allow companies to circumvent the need for project compliance with other permit requirements (e.g., California Environmental Quality Act) or approval processes that typically include county hearings and local approval.

Q. Will this plan streamline all oil and gas activities proposed in the planning area?

A. No. This plan does not circumvent the need for project compliance with other permit requirements (e.g., California Environmental Quality Act) or approval processes that typically include county hearings and local approval. This sole purpose of this General Conservation Plan is to help project proponents comply with state and federal ESA compliance, while at the same time, ensuring actions are conducted in a manner that is consistent with conservation of listed species.

Q. Why aren't other activities included in this General Conservation Plan?

A. Other activities are not included in this General Conservation Plan because General Conservation Plans are intended for situations where a large-scale Habitat Conservation Plan covering many similar actions (e.g., oil and gas activities, small residential developments, etc.) is needed, but where such a plan is not available. A conservation plan covering a wide range of activities would be better addressed under a regional conservation plan.

Q. How can the public provide input during the scoping period?

A. All interested parties are invited to provide comments and information regarding development of a National Environmental Policy Act document for the proposed General Conservation Plan for oil and gas activities in Santa Barbara County. Comments and information will be accepted from August 2 until September 1. The public may submit written comments by one of the following methods:

- Email: Rachel.Henry@fws.gov
- U.S. Mail: Field Supervisor, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Rd. Suite B, Ventura, California 93003
- Fax: 805-644-3965

Q. What type of information is the agency seeking during the public scoping process?

A. The Service is seeking suggestions and information on the scope of issues and alternatives to consider when drafting the EA or EIS, and to identify significant issues and reasonable alternatives related to the Service's proposed action (issuance of incidental take permits under the General Conservation Plan). In order to ensure that we identify a range of issues and alternatives related to the proposed action, we invite comments and suggestions from all interested parties.

Q. Will there be a draft General Conservation Plan for the public to comment on?

A. At this time the Service is seeking suggestions and information on the scope of issues and alternatives to consider when drafting the EA or EIS, and to identify significant issues and reasonable alternatives related to the Service's proposed action (issuance of incidental take permits under the General Conservation Plan). The General Conservation Plan and EA or EIS will be available for public comment at a later date when both documents have been drafted.

Q. What happens next?

A. The Service will determine whether an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is appropriate based on the complexity of issues identified during and following the scoping period. We will conduct a review of this project according to the requirements of NEPA and its regulations, other relevant Federal laws, regulations, policies, and guidance, and our procedures for compliance with applicable regulations. Once the draft EA or EIS and draft General Conservation Plan are completed, we will offer further opportunities for public comment. All incidental take permits issued pursuant to the plan will also incorporate public review and comments. The Service will publish notices of permit applications in the Federal Register.