

# Press Release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Public Scoping Meetings Concerning Environmental Impacts of Alabama Beach Mouse General Conservation Plan**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is proposing a General Conservation Plan for the endangered Alabama beach mouse (ABM) to expedite issuance of permits to build single family homes and duplexes in ABM habitat on Fort Morgan Peninsula. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we, the USFWS must advise the public that we intend to gather information necessary to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on the ABM General Conservation Plan. The public is invited to provide written comments on the potential environmental impacts of the plan by October 6, 2010, or comment in person on September 29, 2010.

**Background:** Private property owners proposing to develop single family/duplex residences on the Fort Morgan Peninsula in Baldwin County, Alabama, must comply with requirements of the Endangered Species Act to avoid and/or minimize impacts to federally protected species, including the ABM. The USFWS recommends property owners, who would impact the ABM, develop a Habitat Conservation Plan and apply for an Incidental Take Permit in order to avoid violating take prohibitions in the Act. This process includes submitting a development proposal to the USFWS that outlines ways to minimize and mitigate any harm done to the species. We currently process these applications in batches every 18 to 24 months, which results in delaying the applicant's ability to use their lots for years before they receive their permits. In an effort to provide permits more efficiently and still protect endangered species, the USFWS is seeking approval of a General Conservation Plan.

**Draft Plan:** The ABM General Conservation Plan will be a master plan which the USFWS will use to expedite the permitting process and still conserve the area's natural resources. Currently, it takes an applicant one to two years to receive a permit. This plan would speed up the process to less than three months, as long as the applicants meet specific requirements under the plan, including a development footprint that does not exceed 0.1 acre (4,350 square feet). An integral part of the General Conservation Plan is an in-lieu-fee proposal. The in-lieu-fee would be determined at a rate of \$2.30 per square foot of developed area. The funds collected would be used to further ABM conservation across its range through monitoring, habitat restoration, land purchase, and research. The plan coverage area extends along the Gulf of Mexico for about seventeen miles, encompassing about 2,400 acres of ABM habitat. The coverage area begins at Little Lagoon Pass on State Hwy182 in Gulf Shores, and extends westward to the tip of the Fort Morgan State Historic site at the western part of Fort Morgan Peninsula. Species covered under the plan are Alabama beach mouse, Loggerhead sea turtle, and Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

**Environmental Impacts:** The USFWS must analyze the impacts on the environmental, social, and economic factors due to the General Conservation Plan. The purpose of scoping is to identify what needs to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement, clearly defining the proposed action and alternatives, gathering data, conducting analysis, and identifying environmental effects.

**Public Participation:** On September 29, 2010, the public will have the opportunity to provide input into what factors the USFWS will use to evaluate the environmental impact statement for the ABM General Conservation Plan. The USFWS is hosting two Public Scoping Meetings at the Gulf Shores Adult Activities Center. The meetings will begin at 2pm and 6pm. Persons wishing to provide relevant written information or comments regarding these

activities may submit them at the scoping meetings or to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alabama Field Office, 1208-B Main Street, Daphne, AL 36525 (Attn: Darren LeBlanc). For a more detailed description of the Environment Impact Statement of the Draft ABM General Conservation Plan, go to our website, <http://www.fws.gov/daphne>. You can also contact the Alabama Field Office public information officer, Denise Rowell, [denise\\_rowell@fws.gov](mailto:denise_rowell@fws.gov), 251-441-6630.