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Service Proposes Amending Industry Conservation Plan for the American Burying Beetle

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing an amendment to the American Burying Beetle Industry Conservation Plan (ABB ICP). The plan was originally approved in 2014 to provide the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma a streamlined Endangered Species Act (ESA) permitting process for activities that may impact the American burying beetle (ABB).

Since approval of the ABB ICP, the Service has had significantly fewer than anticipated requests for permits and as a result, only a small fraction of the 32,234 acres of authorized “take” under the ABB ICP have been issued. “Take” is defined by the ESA as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in such conduct. In the interest of providing industry with greater certainty while continuing to ensure the conservation of the American burying beetle, the Service is proposing to amend the ABB ICP to extend it for three years (through May 20, 2019). Publication of the notice begins a 30-day comment period.

In addition to extending the ABB ICP timeframe, the amendment proposes to: extend the construction period for permitted projects until May 20, 2025; extend operations and maintenance coverage for activities including maintenance of right-of-ways and repairing pipelines until May 20, 2039; and remove requirements that all projects must be completely located within the planning area. The proposed amendment does not change the acres of take authorized under the 2014 ABB ICP and no additional acreage will be impacted. The Service is also announcing the availability of an environmental assessment on the amendment.

“Extending the timeframe for the ABB ICP will help ensure that future oil and gas development in Oklahoma has minimal impacts on the American burying beetle.” said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The Service has worked closely with oil and gas operators over the last few years on implementation of the American burying beetle ICP and believes that extending its timeframe will benefit both the American burying beetle and the oil and gas industry.”

The ICP covers take of the ABB that is incidental to activities associated with oil and gas exploration and the construction, operation, maintenance, repair and decommissioning of oil and

gas pipelines and related well fields in 45 Oklahoma counties. The ICP allows oil and gas operators to proceed with projects in covered counties while conserving the ABB and its habitat.

Under the ICP, restoration activities for the ABB include replacing topsoil, relieving soil compaction, reestablishing vegetation and inspecting and removing invasive species to minimize ABB impacts. Additionally, mitigation is provided through off-site conservation and management of ABB habitat in perpetuity.

The Service listed the ABB as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1989. Once found throughout the eastern U.S., the ABB is currently known to exist in only eight states (South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Rhode Island and Massachusetts), which represents about five percent of its historic range.

During the 30-day public comment period the Service is encouraging the public, industry and scientific community to review and comment on the proposed amendment to the ABB ICP. To ensure consideration, we must receive written comments on or before close of business on April 7, 2016. You may obtain copies of the proposed ABB ICP amendment at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Oklahoma/ABBICP>. For further information on how to obtain or review copies of these documents, or how to provide comments, see the *Federal Register* notice at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/index.html>.

America's fish, wildlife, and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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