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Service to Evaluate Request for Incidental Take of Seven Federally Listed Species by the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the intent to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the impacts of, and alternatives to, the proposed issuance of an section 10(a)(1)(B) permit to one or more members of the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program (Applicant) for the incidental take of seven federally listed species from activities associated with management and use of the Edwards Aquifer.

This announcement begins a 90 day public comment period. All comments must be received by close of business on June 3, 2010.

The Applicant(s) proposes to apply for an incidental take permit through development and implementation of an HCP. The proposed HCP will include measures to minimize and mitigate the impacts of potential taking of federally listed species and their habitats by the management and use of the Edwards Aquifer.

The Aquifer supplies water to areas associated with the Comal and San Marcos springs, including Austin and San Antonio, Texas, and supports multiple species federally listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (Act). Additionally, the Aquifer is the major inflow of freshwater to the Guadalupe River, which provides the estuary habitat for blue crab – the primary food source for wintering whooping cranes.

The incidental take permit is for seven species listed as endangered or threatened within the permit area. These species include: fountain darter (*Etheostoma fonticola*), San Marcos salamander (*Eurycea nana*), San Marcos gambusia (*Gambusia georgei*), Texas blind salamander (*Eurycea rathbuni*), Peck's cave amphipod (*Stygobromus pecki*), Comal Springs dryopid beetle (*Stygoparnus comalensis*), and the Comal Springs riffle beetle (*Heterolemis comalensis*). The Service will also evaluate possible impacts to species not listed here, such as Texas wild rice and the whooping crane.

Counties that may be included in the proposed permit area are those counties within the Edwards Aquifer Authority jurisdiction to manage the Edwards Aquifer including all, or portions of, eight counties; Atascosa, Bexar, Caldwell, Comal, Guadalupe, Hays, Medina and Uvalde.

Public scoping meetings will be held at seven locations throughout South Central and South Texas. Exact meeting locations and times will be noticed in local newspapers and at the Austin Ecological Services Office website, <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>, at least 2 weeks prior to each event.

For more information on these proposals or how to comment see the Federal Register notice at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/index.html>, or contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnett Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758-4460; telephone 512/490-0057; facsimile 512/490-0974; or email luela_roberts@fws.gov.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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