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Service Proposes Industry Conservation Plan for the American Burying Beetle

Service and Industry Work Together to Address Beetle Conservation and the ESA Permitting Process

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is announcing the availability of a plan to streamline the Endangered Species Act (Act) permitting process for oil and gas activities that may impact the American burying beetle (ABB) in Oklahoma. The public, industry and scientific community are encouraged to review and comment on the proposed Industry Conservation Plan (ICP) for the American burying beetle, as well as the draft environmental assessment (dEA) during the 14-day public comment period.

The proposed ICP would cover 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. If approved, the ICP would provide oil and gas operators the ability to proceed with projects in covered counties while conserving the American burying beetle and its habitat.

“The Service is committed to implementing programs that conserve the ABB while enabling activities to proceed on the landscape.” said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We have been diligently working with industry to develop the proposed ICP and believe that it will provide industry with a tool for addressing ABB-related issues.”

If approved, the ICP would be in effect for two years and would cover 45 Oklahoma counties including Adair, Atoka, Bryan, Carter, Cherokee, Choctaw, Cleveland, Coal, Craig, Creek, Delaware, Garvin, Haskell, Hughes, Johnston, Kay, Latimer, Le Flore, Lincoln, Love, Marshall, Mayes, McClain, McCurtain, McIntosh, Murray, Muskogee, Noble, Nowata, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Osage, Ottawa, Pawnee, Payne, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Pushmataha, Rogers, Seminole, Sequoyah, Tulsa, Wagoner, and Washington.

In May 2012, the Service began developing a General Conservation Plan (GCP) to provide a long-term efficient mechanism for compliance with the Endangered Species Act for oil and gas operators who require incidental take permits for oil and gas development. Once completed, this tool will provide participants enrolled in the GCP the ability to receive incidental take coverage through a permit for the ABB under section 10 of the Act.

The ABB GCP could not be completed prior to the 2014 ABB active season as a result of a science review and the statutory/regulatory requirements to complete the GCP. To provide industry with a compliance option in the near term, the draft ICP has been developed to cover the 2014 and 2015 ABB active seasons.

The Service listed the ABB as endangered 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 historically occupied range.

During the public comment period, the Service is requesting public comments on the proposed ICP and dEA. To ensure consideration, we must receive written comments on or before close of business on April 30, 2014. You may obtain copies of the proposed ICP and dEA online 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, visit www.fws.gov, or connect with us through any of these social media channels:



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