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Service Announces a Draft Environmental Assessment on an Application for an Enhancement of Survival Permit for the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard in Texas

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will announce in the Federal Register October 6, 2011, a Notice Of Availability (NOA) of a draft Environmental Assessment (dEA) on an application for an enhancement of survival permit under Section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended, for the dunes sagebrush lizard (*Sceloporus arenicolus*)(DSL). The application was submitted by The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (TX CPA).

The permit application includes the draft Texas Conservation Plan for the Dunes Sagebrush Lizard (TX CP DSL) that will function as a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) between the Service and TX CPA for the dunes sagebrush lizard (DSL) throughout its range in Texas.

The proposed CCAA would be in effect for 30 years in west and northwest Texas. This area constitutes the CCAA's Planning Area, with Covered Areas being private lands and state trust lands that provide suitable habitat or are being improved or restored to provide suitable habitat for the DSL. The Applicant proposes to implement conservation measures for the DSL by removing threats to the survival of these species and protecting their habitat. If the DSL becomes listed in the future, the draft TX CP DSL may also act as a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in support of future applications for incidental take permits under the ESA.

The draft TX CP DSL and the dEA are available for public review and comment on the potential issuance of the above permits. The comment period runs for 60 days and all comments must be received by December 5, 2011. To review the application, the draft TX CP DSL, the draft EA, or other related documents, learn how to obtain copies or submit comments, visit the Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest>.

The DSL is native to a small area of southeastern New Mexico and west Texas. The species is a habitat specialist and only occurs in sand dune complexes associated with shinnery oak. The primary threat to the lizard is oil and gas development near dune complexes, and shinnery oak removal for the enhancement of forage production for grazing. This has resulted in increased fragmentation of DSL habitat and gaps in the species' range.

In 2001, the Service determined that listing of the DSL was warranted, but precluded from listing because of other higher priority species. The species was then designated as a candidate for protection under the Act. Since then the Service determined that the DSL was in danger of extinction throughout its entire range, based on the immediacy, severity, and scope of the ongoing significant threats of habitat loss and fragmentation. On December 13, 2010, the Service took action to protect the dunes sagebrush lizard by proposing it as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. A public review and comment period on the proposed listing was opened for a total of 90 days.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on the ecosystems that sustains listed species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our community.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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