



**Arizona Ecological Services Field Office**  
2321 W. Royal Palm Rd, Ste 103  
Phoenix, AZ 85021  
[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)

***Public Affairs Office***

**U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca**  
**Fort Huachuca, Arizona 85613-6000**  
<http://huachuca-www.army.mil/sites/local/>



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Contact: Tanja M. Linton (FH) 520-533-1287  
Jeff Humphrey (FWS) 602-242-0210 x222

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Issues Biological Opinion to Fort Huachuca  
- Fort Operations Will Not Jeopardize Endangered Species -**

FORT HUACHUCA, Ariz. - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army have completed formal consultation regarding the potential effects that Fort Huachuca's operations will have on threatened and endangered species. In a [biological opinion](#) (BO) signed Monday, the Service concluded that the Army's ongoing and planned operations are not likely to jeopardize the continued survival or recovery of any threatened, endangered or proposed species or result in adverse modification of existing or proposed critical habitat, on-post or in the nearby San Pedro and Babocomari rivers.

This is the fourth Endangered Species Act programmatic-level consultation and BO of the Fort's operations. The 2007 BO was remanded by federal court in 2011. Fort and Service staff worked closely to update and assess the Fort's hydrological and biological effects. In January 2014, the Fort requested formal consultation. The resulting BO addresses the court's concerns and endangered species' needs, and constitutes 10 years of Endangered Species Act (ESA) coverage for the Fort.

"The Fort continues its superb job of furthering endangered species conservation – continuing to be a crucial partner in species recovery," said Steve Spangle, the Service's Arizona field supervisor. "Even as we finish this consultation, the Fort is completing additional water

management conservation easements to protect San Pedro and Babocomari river flows and riparian habitat.”

The consultation evaluated how the Fort’s 10-year plan for land use, training activities, construction activities, administration and support actions, recreation, fire management, and other activities would affect listed species and their critical habitat. Specifically addressed were effects to the endangered Huachuca water umbel (a semiaquatic plant), jaguar, lesser long-nosed bat, ocelot, Sonora tiger salamander, and the threatened Chiricahua leopard frog and Mexican spotted owl, as well as applicable critical habitat designations.

There are a number of differences between the Fort’s 2007 and 2014 ten-year plans and the Service’s applicable BOs. As a result of the Fort’s improved water savings and purchase of conservation easements retiring or precluding much agricultural water use in the San Pedro and Babocomari basins, the Service determined that the Fort’s operations will not affect the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and its critical habitat over the next 10 years. The Fort and Service conferenced on the effects to two riparian species recently proposed for listing as threatened species – the northern Mexican gartersnake and yellow-billed cuckoo. The Service also incorporates the effects of climate change in the new analysis, as well as its determination that the Fort’s programs do not preclude species recovery or survival.

Both Fort Huachuca and the Service again relied on the increased scientific understanding generated through participation in the Upper San Pedro Partnership's technical committee and, in particular, on the rigorous scientific studies by the Partnership.

The BO reflects the Fort’s activities and conservation measures to safeguard federally-listed species and their critical habitat, in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The Service based this BO on the installation’s effect on the local water table based on water use per person by the Fort-attributable population and wrote the BO in the context of Section 321 of the 2004 Defense Authorization Act (PL 108-136), under which the Service could not consider the effects of non-federal actions related to water consumption when consulting with the Fort under the ESA.

“This biological opinion, which is the result of a lot of hard work and cooperation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army, gives us the flexibility to support current military and national security missions and the ability to support future missions while ensuring we continue to meet all requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Fort Huachuca has been sustaining the land it defends since 1877 and continues to be a leader in environmental stewardship in southeastern Arizona, the Army and the Department of Defense. We are committed to continuing our water conservation and mitigation efforts,” said Col. Dan McFarland, U.S. Army Fort Huachuca garrison commander.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The final Biological Opinion is posted at:  
<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

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