

# Great Plains Wind Energy Environmental Impact Statement

## Project Overview

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Great Plains Wind Energy Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A primary goal of the HCP is to develop a consistent, systematic, and predictable approach for wind energy development while supporting the conservation of certain species. The objective of the EIS is to evaluate the potential impacts that would result from the proposed HCP and associated Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for potential species take associated with construction, operation, and maintenance activities associated

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS):** An EIS is prepared for any major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The EIS will incorporate public and agency comments and analyze the potential impacts resulting from the proposed Federal action, as well as any reasonable alternatives.

**HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN (HCP):** A planning document that describes how the impacts of an incidental take will be minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable to ensure the affected species will be conserved.

**INCIDENTAL TAKE PERMIT (ITP):** A permit that allows the incidental "take" of a listed species if it occurs during otherwise legal activities.

**TAKE:** To harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect any fish or wildlife species listed under ESA as endangered or threatened.

with multiple commercial wind energy facilities within North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

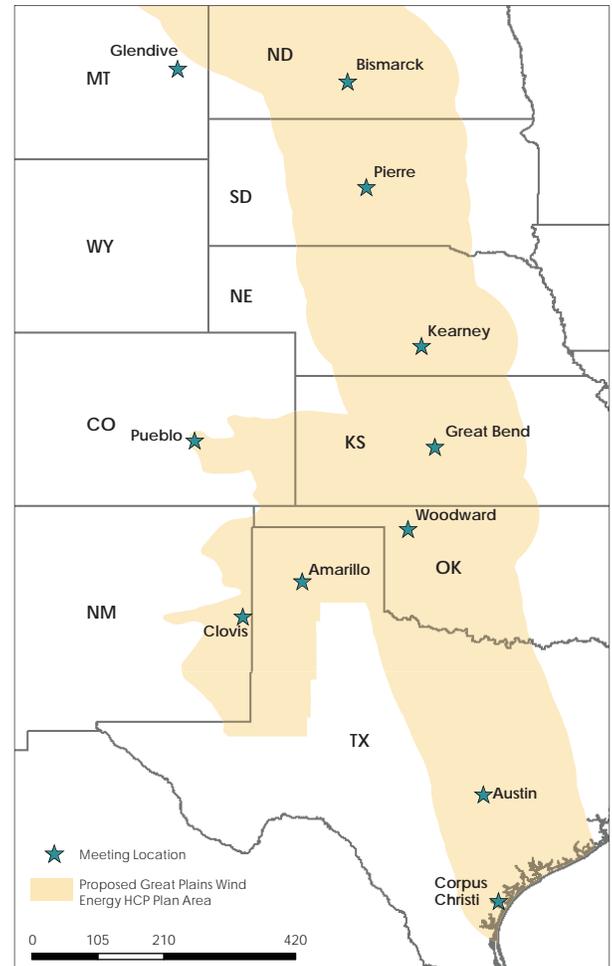
## Project Background

Development of utility-scale wind energy projects has become more complex over the past few years. Project stakeholders and natural resources agencies, such as the Service, are increasingly concerned about endangered species and their habitats. Of particular concern is the endangered whooping crane, whose migration corridor overlaps some of the richest wind energy resources in the United States.

Recognizing the concerns, 19 wind developers have formed the Wind Energy Whooping Crane Action Group (WEWAG).

## HCP and EIS

Development of the HCP by WEWAG was initiated in 2008 pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B) of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The HCP and any incidental take associated with the proposed implementation of the HCP for wind development must be evaluated and approved by the Service. The Service's issuance of an ITP is



Proposed Plan Area Map

a federal action, which therefore must comply with NEPA. Due to the extent of potential impacts and the high level of public/stakeholder interest associated with a proposed decision to implement the HCP, the Service has determined that an EIS is the appropriate level of NEPA review because it gives the most opportunity for public and agency comments and has the most in-depth level of analysis.



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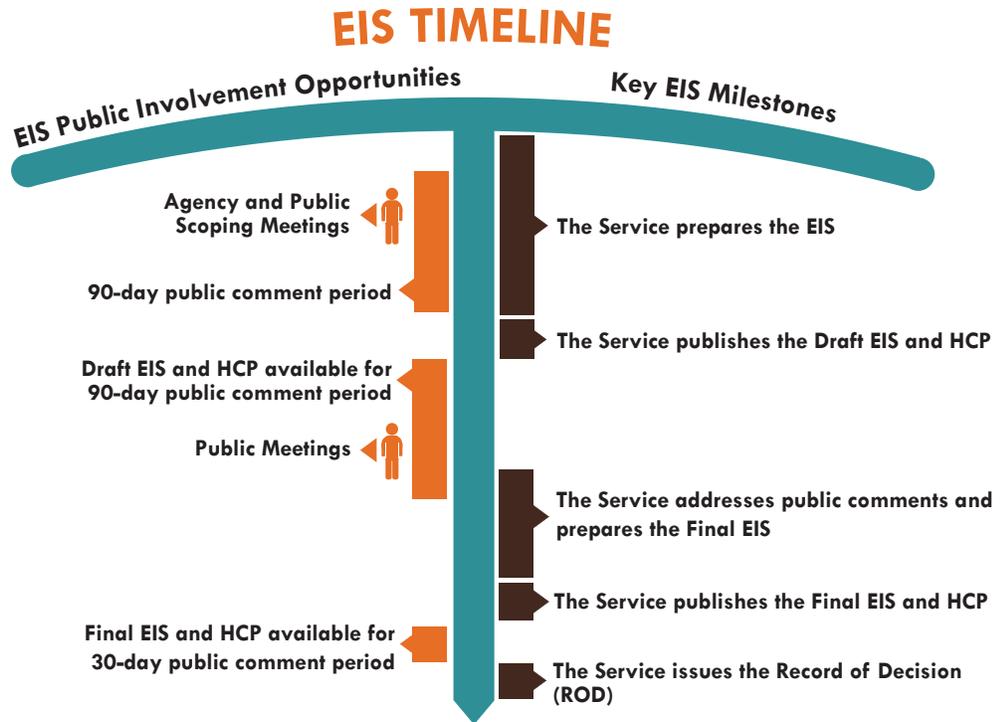
Species being considered for inclusion in the HCP include certain species listed as federally threatened or endangered or as having the potential to become listed during the life of the HCP and having some likelihood of being taken from within the proposed Plan Area. Species currently considered for inclusion in the ITP application are the: whooping crane (*Grus americana*), endangered; interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*), endangered; piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), threatened; and lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), candidate for listing. In addition, WEWAG is evaluating the potential impacts on numerous other species which includes development of Species Take Avoidance Measures (STAMs). In the event that STAMs can not be developed, the species may be covered species in the HCP.

## Alternatives

The EIS will consider several alternatives, including the Proposed Action (issuance of an ITP, as supported by an HCP), No-Action (no ITP issuance), and additional alternatives that accomplish the purpose and need of the EIS. Alternatives may include, but are not limited to, variations of covered species lists, different land-coverage areas, and activities that may be covered.

### The Great Plains Wind Energy HCP is intended to:

- Promote species conservation
- Determine measures that would minimize incidental take
- Facilitate responsible wind energy development



For more information, please visit the project website at: [www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)

### Ways to submit comments:

- **E-mail:** [WindEnergyHCPComments@fws.gov](mailto:WindEnergyHCPComments@fws.gov)
- **Toll-Free Message Service:** 800-815-8927
- **U.S. Mail:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | Attention: Laila Lienesch, P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306
- **Fax:** 505-248-6922 (Attention: Laila Lienesch)
- **Leave a comment at this meeting!**

## Proposed Action

The proposed action is the Service's issuance of an ITP(s), which authorizes incidental take associated with utility-scale wind power development within the nine-state region, including portions of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. The proposed action would require that the HCP and associated development, construction, and operation of utility-scale wind power within the Plan Area meet all the permit issuance criteria, pursuant to Section 10 of the ESA. The anticipated permit duration is 45 years.

## Proposed Plan Area

The Plan Area for the Great Plains Wind Energy HCP is proposed to include non-federal lands within: 1) 100 miles on each side of the center line of the whooping crane migration corridor, extending from the Gulf Coast of Texas to the Canadian border, and 2) portions of the historic range of the lesser prairie-chicken, with the boundary extending into parts of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas.

