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In Reply Refer To:
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02-21-03-F-0232

August 18, 2006

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon, Arizona

From: Field Supervisor

Subject: Second Addendum to the Biological Opinion for Prescribed Fire in Grand Canyon National Park

Thank you for your June 29, 2006, letter requesting formal consultation on the Range and Roost prescribed fire units in Grand Canyon National Park (Park), Coconino County, Arizona. The request was for a formal consultation on the effects of the proposed action on the Mexican spotted owl (MSO) (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) and its critical habitat, and the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*). The letter also included a request for concurrence with a determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). We previously conducted a formal consultation regarding a batch of prescribed fires that were proposed for the Park. A biological opinion (02-21-03-F-0232) for those projects was issued on August 22, 2003. The Roost prescribed fire unit was included in that consultation but the Range unit was not. According to your June 29 letter and the accompanying June 2006 biological evaluation (BE), the new request for formal consultation on the Roost and Range units is largely due to the additional unit and an increase in expected effects to the MSO and its critical habitat. After review of the BE, we believe the anticipated additional effects and other project changes can be addressed with this addendum to the 2003 biological opinion (2003 BO). We incorporate the August 22, 2003, biological opinion here by reference and that biological opinion will be implemented for the Range and Roost units. This addendum outlines the differences and modifications that are incorporated into the 2003 BO through this document.

Prescribed fire will occur in the two units on a total of 4,390 acres of the mixed conifer cover type on the North Rim of the Park. That total represents 2,205 acres of restricted MSO habitat and critical habitat for the Range unit and 2,185 acres for the Roost unit. In addition to the MSO habitat and critical habitat that will receive prescribed fire, four MSO protected activity centers (PACs) may be affected by smoke and fire management activities. However, the Dragon, Transept, Manzanita, and Cottonwood PACs will not receive prescribed fire.

In addition to other units, the 2003 BO addressed the anticipated effects of prescribed fires proposed for the North Rim including the Roost unit. The North Rim units were anticipated to reduce MSO restricted habitat by as much as ten percent as a result of small patches of moderate to high intensity fire. A total of 1,317 acres in seven prescribed fire units of MSO habitat was expected to result in such a reduction. According to the 2006 BE, the Park now anticipates that prescribed fire in the Range and Roost units may reduce MSO restricted and critical habitat by up to as much as twenty percent due to moderate-high and high severity fire effects. For those two units, such a reduction could occur up to 878 acres. This figure represents an increase of 660 acres of MSO habitat and critical habitat that will be reduced due to moderate-high and high severity fire. Thus, a total of 1,977 acres of the Range, Roost, and other North Rim prescribed fires are now expected to burn at moderate-high and high severity. Although no prescribed fire will occur in MSO PACs, up to four PACs may be affected by smoke and fire management activities.

We believe the 2003 BO adequately addresses the anticipated increase in effects that are described in the paragraph above. Although MSO critical habitat was redesignated on August 31, 2004, with slightly different primary constituent elements than those analyzed in the 2003 BO, we believe the analysis of critical habitat in that BO is adequate for the Range and Roost units. This addendum modifies the 2003 BO to include the changes in effects represented by the additional burn unit and the expected increase in effects to the MSO and its critical habitat. Except for the modifications below, all of the action components of the 2003 BO for all species, including the conservation measures, incidental take statement, conclusions, and conservation recommendations now also apply to and will be implemented for the Range and Roost prescribed fire units. For the Range and Roost units only, the following modifications are incorporated by reference into the 2003 BO.

Replace the first general measure (titled “Prescribing only low intensity fires”) with the following measure. The following measure will also be added to the MSO and MSO critical habitat conservation measures.

Use prescribed fire to restore and maintain historic fire regimes within this ecosystem by varying management prescriptions to: (a) reproduce natural disturbance patterns; (b) maintain all species of native vegetation in the landscape, including early seral species; (c) allow natural gap processes to occur creating horizontal variation in stand structure and heterogeneity across the landscape; (d) promote the growth of large trees by thinning understory vegetation through the use of low to moderate intensity burning to achieve burn objectives; and (e) reduce the risk of catastrophic, stand-replacing wildfire.

Replace the second conservation measure for MSO and MSO critical habitat with the following conservation measure.

To minimize negative effects on habitat, prescribed fires will be implemented under prescriptions that will result in primarily low (preferably) and moderate (when necessary to achieve objectives) intensity burns that will minimize the resulting amount of moderate-high and high severity burns.

Add the following conservation measure to the measures for the California condor.

Aircraft will not leave any helipad while condors are perched within 100 meters of the aircraft unless safety concerns override this restriction. Permitted personnel will be notified and will haze the condors from the area as soon as possible.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact Bill Austin (x102) or Brenda Smith (x101) at (928) 226-0614.

/s/ Steven L. Spangle

cc: Director, Science Center, Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon, AZ
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