



News Release

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For Release: May 5, 2008

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Fish and Wildlife Service Approves Salt River Project Habitat Conservation Plan Issues Endangered Species Permit for Reservoir Operations

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has accepted Salt River Project's Horseshoe and Bartlett reservoirs habitat conservation plan (HCP). The plan minimizes and offsets harm that the operation of the two Verde River reservoirs may pose to federally threatened and endangered wildlife and other sensitive species. As a result of the SRP's commitment to conserve native wildlife and habitat, the Service is permitting the loss of some individuals that result from dam operations over the next 50 years. SRP operates Horseshoe and Bartlett reservoirs to store water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural use in central Arizona.

Reservoir operations may affect 200-400 acres, averaged annually, of endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and rare yellow-billed cuckoo habitat at the upper end of Horseshoe Reservoir. Reservoir operations can also favor nonnative fish species that prey upon or compete with the Verde River's native fishes, leopard frogs, and gartersnakes.

"Providing reliable water to an expanding desert community is an enormous engineering and financial challenge. But the costs go beyond dollars and dams and extend to our native wildlife," said Debra Bills, supervisory fish and wildlife biologist in the Service's Arizona Ecological Services Office. "SRP recognized these environmental effects, worked with us to quantify them and developed a workable plan that will conserve our wildlife while still guaranteeing the reservoirs can store vital water."

Species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act are protected from "take," including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying their habitat. The Service may issue permits to take federally listed species when such a taking is incidental to – and not the purpose of – otherwise lawful activities and the taking does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

The Service evaluated SRP's HCP and issued a permit for the incidental take of endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, razorback sucker, Colorado pikeminnow and Gila topminnow; threatened spikedace and loach minnow, and threatened bald eagle. The plan also addresses nine unlisted species – the yellow-billed cuckoo, roundtail chub, longfin and speckled daces, Sonora and desert suckers, northern Mexican and narrow-headed gartersnakes and lowland leopard frog, should those species be federally listed in the future.

SRP is committing to manage reservoir levels to favor willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo habitat, while also minimizing benefits to nonnative fishes that threaten sensitive aquatic species. Additionally, river-side habitat will be acquired along the Verde and Gila rivers for covered bird species, a fish barrier will

be constructed to exclude nonnative fish from Lime Creek to protect native fish and leopard frogs, and a State native fish hatchery will be expanded for the production and stocking of native fish. In total, SRP and the City of Phoenix are committing \$6.5 million in habitat acquisition and management, native fish production and stocking, and monitoring over the 50-year period, which could increase to as much as \$9 million if necessary. The City of Phoenix is a partner in the HCP because it has substantial water rights in Horseshoe Reservoir.

The HCP, incidental take permit and supporting documents are available electronically at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/HCPs.htm>. Printed and CD copies of the documents are also available by contacting Mr. Charles Paradzick, Salt River Project, P.O. Box 52025, Phoenix, Ariz., 85072-2026 at (602) 236-2724.

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.

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