



# News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office  
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103  
Phoenix, Arizona 85021  
602/242-0210  
602/242-2513 (Fax)

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[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)

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Contacts: Marty Tuegel (FWS) (505) 248-6651  
Jeff Humphrey (FWS) (602) 242-0210 x222  
Bill Radke, Leslie Canyon National Wildlife Refuge (FWS) (520) 364-2104 x101  
Peter Warren (TNC Senior Field Representative) (520) 547-3436  
Bill McDonald, Malpai Borderlands Group (520) 558-2470

## **ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO RANCHERS COMPLETE PLANS TO AID THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved plans by ranchers to manage for threatened and endangered species on nearly one million acres of grassland straddling the southeastern corner of Arizona (Cochise County) and the southwestern corner of New Mexico (Hidalgo County).

The Malpai Borderlands Group has completed a habitat conservation plan (HCP) designed to improve grasslands and watersheds and allow participating ranchers to conduct specific ranch management activities while minimizing and offsetting potential adverse effects to 19 wildlife and plant species of concern – nine protected under the Endangered Species Act. The Service has issued a permit allowing Malpai and rancher-enrollees to take threatened and endangered species if it occurs incidentally to their operations.

Additionally, the operators of the Bar Boot and 99 Bar ranches and the Service have developed the Leslie Canyon Watershed Safe Harbor Agreement – a plan to assist in the recovery of six Endangered Species Act-protected species on private ranchlands in the southeastern Cochise County watershed.

“Once again the Malpai Borderlands Group and area ranchers have shown that the people who work and live on the land are the most capable of managing it properly,” said Steve Spangle, the Service’s Arizona Ecological Services Field Supervisor. “These people have kept this country wild and healthy for generations and are motivated to continue to do so for the generations to follow.”

### **Malpai Borderlands**

The Malpai Borderlands HCP proposes grassland improvement projects – including prescribed fires and fire use, erosion control and mechanical brush removal projects. The plan also addresses routine ranch management activities – including construction of fences, pipelines and roads; livestock management; and use and maintenance of livestock ponds/tanks.

Grassland improvement and ranch management projects may result in the taking of threatened or endangered species and have short-term impacts to species and their habitats. But through these activities, long-term benefits for the species are anticipated.

Federally threatened and endangered species are protected from “take,” including harassment or harm resulting from altering or destroying their habitat. The Service may however, under limited circumstances,

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 survival of the species.

In the past, endangered species issues in the Malpai Borderlands have been addressed on an inefficient, project-by-project basis. As a result, Malpai Borderlands Group developed the HCP as a more comprehensive alternative to multiple individual consultations frequently conducted through other federal agency intermediaries.

The endangered and threatened species that occur in the Malpai Borderlands include Yaqui chub, Yaqui topminnow, Yaqui catfish, beautiful shiner, Huachuca water-umbel (an aquatic plant), northern Aplomado falcon, Mexican spotted owl, Chiricahua leopard frog, and New Mexico ridge-nosed rattlesnake. The candidate yellow-billed cuckoo and nine other species of concern are also addressed in the HCP.

Malpai Borderlands Group is a private, non-profit organization composed of ranchers who live in the 828,000-acre Malpai borderlands – an area named by ranchers from the Spanish “*Mal país*,” meaning “badlands,” along the U.S.-Mexico border. The group was established in 1994 to represent and pursue the interests of that ranching community. It seeks to do so by maintaining and improving the area’s open space values, traditional ranching economies, biodiversity, and natural habitats through cooperation and partnership among the various entities—state, Federal, and private—having an interest or role in achieving these goals. Malpai Borderlands Group thus seeks to balance sustainable ranching with sound land stewardship, and to do so by developing strategic alliances among the ranching, conservation, regulatory, and scientific communities.

### **Leslie Canyon Watershed**

The Leslie Canyon Watershed Safe Harbor Agreement establishes a conservation program on the Bar Boot and 99 Bar ranches for the threatened beautiful shiner, Chiricahua leopard frog, Yaqui catfish, and the endangered Yaqui chub, Yaqui topminnow and Huachuca water umbel.

The ranchers will assist species recovery by reestablishing species populations, restoring and maintaining habitat by improving watershed conditions upstream from Leslie Canyon National Wildlife Refuge (LCNWR) and providing for the natural expansion of the species into improving habitats in the upper watershed. Chiricahua leopard frogs and Yaqui topminnow could be reestablished on the ranches as early as spring, 2009.

The two ranches include 24,585 acres in the upper Leslie Canyon watershed downstream from the Coronado National Forest Boundary and upstream from the LCNWR. The ranchers will work to enhance and maintain their portion of the Leslie Canyon watershed through watershed improvements, such as partial fencing, erosion control activities, and other riparian and hydrologic improvements. Ongoing land use activities, watershed improvement activities, and species management and monitoring activities are part of the agreement and are permitted under the Endangered Species Act.

Because many endangered and threatened species occur primarily or exclusively on private land, it is critical to involve private landowners in their conservation and recovery. Many landowners want to take action to help conserve these species on their property, but are concerned about potential land use restrictions that may occur if listed species begin to colonize or expand their numbers as a result of conservation actions. Due to these concerns, some landowners may limit land and water management practices that could enhance and maintain habitat for listed species.

To allay those concerns and provide landowners with both management flexibility and regulatory certainty, the Service developed the Safe Harbor program. Under this program, the Service initiates Safe Harbor Agreements with willing landowners who agree to provide habitat for listed species. The Service first

establishes a "baseline" status for the species on the property, and develops an agreement under which the landowner agrees to undertake management actions that, directly or indirectly, will contribute to the recovery of the species.

In return for these efforts, the Service issues an "enhancement of survival" permit that provides assurances that, when the agreement's term ends, the participating landowner may use the property in any otherwise legal manner that ensures that it stays at or above the baseline conditions established when the agreement began. The enhancement of survival permit allows incidental take of threatened and endangered species and habitat modifications that could return the property to conditions agreed upon as baseline.

The Service sought public review and input on the draft Malpai and Leslie Canyon Watershed plans in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Both plans are available online at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/> .

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](http://www.fws.gov).

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Note to Editors:

Photographs of the relevant species are available at [http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Image\\_Lib.htm](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Image_Lib.htm) or by contacting Bill Radke at 520/364-2104 or Jeff Humphrey at 602/242-0210 x222.

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