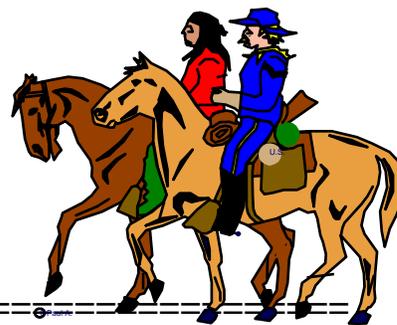




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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Issues Biological Opinion to Fort Huachuca

FORT HUACHUCA, Ariz. - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the completion of several months of formal consultation with Fort Huachuca, in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and presented Fort officials with the final Biological Opinion.

The BO concludes the Army's proposed activities at and near Fort Huachuca are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any federally listed species or adversely modify their critical habitat. The Fort's effects to riparian-dependent species – the Huachuca water umbel and southwestern willow flycatcher – are minimized by its water mitigation efforts. Fort Huachuca's ongoing commitment to land management also insures that the species that occur in the grasslands, canyons, and mountains on the installation – the Mexican spotted owl, lesser long-nosed bat, and Sonora tiger salamander – are also protected. The agreement constitutes 10 years of environmental coverage for the Fort.

Both Fort Huachuca and the Service relied heavily 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 designated critical habitat, in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. This BO was based on the installation's effect on the local water table using a 'per capita' basis methodology and written 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 when consulting with the Fort under the ESA.

“The Fort has done a superb job with endangered species conservation and continues its remarkable stewardship – going beyond compliance,” said Steve Spangle, the Service's Arizona field supervisor. “We anticipate they will continue their unparalleled record of water management during the years to come.”

Fort Huachuca officials praised the cooperative effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and committed to continue working closely together for the benefit of the species involved. “This opinion, which is an agreement between the Fort and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, gives us the flexibility we needed to respond to changing missions and the Global War on Terrorism, while ensuring we continue to meet all requirements of the Endangered Species Act and continue our water conservation and mitigation efforts,” said Col. Jonathan Hunter, U.S. Army garrison commander.

Since 1993 the Fort has reduced its water consumption by 50 percent and projects it can continue to reduce its groundwater use, increase artificial recharge of urban runoff and achieve additional effluent recharge by 2016. Under the agreement, by 2016, the Fort will have in place the projects to even further reduce its current impact on the river.

The Fort and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue their active participation and commitment to the Upper San Pedro Partnership to address off post water usage not associated with the Fort. To date, the Partnership has implemented a number of projects to help reduce the regional water deficit. There is still an urgent need for action to ensure the San Pedro River is protected, and the 2011 target date for aquifer sustainability found in Section 321 is still in effect.

“Fort Huachuca and the Upper San Pedro Partnership have provided real leadership in collaborative conservation. The BO reflects their work with local communities to safeguard the San Pedro River’s water supply, and demonstrates an outstanding commitment to conservation while simultaneously protecting the military’s mission,” said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, the Service’s southwest regional director. “I look forward to working with the Fort and the Partnership in our on-going efforts to protect listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.”

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