



News Release

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Agency Requests Public Comment on Proposal For Construction of Towers on National Wildlife Refuge

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft finding on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) request to construct towers associated with the Secure Border Initiative on Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The Refuge has determined that DHS's proposal to construct 4 permanent surveillance towers and 1 communication tower on the Refuge is compatible with the purposes of the refuge, according to the draft finding. As part of the formal Compatibility Determination (CD) process the Refuge is soliciting comments from the public on the draft CD.

Written comments will be accepted thru Tuesday, September 2, 2008.

The CD process is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 for all proposed uses of National Wildlife Refuge lands. The assessment that the proposed use is compatible is based on certain stipulations being implemented by DHS. These stipulations are included in the draft CD.

As currently designed, each surveillance tower will be 80-feet tall and the communication tower will be 120-feet tall. All 5 towers will be placed on concrete foundations, will include an equipment shelter, and will be enclosed by a chain-link fence.

Although placement of the towers may have some short term impacts to the environment, the Refuge finds that the towers as proposed will not significantly impact the Refuge purposes. Furthermore, based on the information provided by DHS, the Refuge expects that successful operation of the towers will result in a decrease in the environmental impacts caused by illegal immigration as well as an overall reduction in DHS operations on the Refuge. These reductions will enhance the experience members of the public have when visiting the refuge.

The purpose of this comment period is to offer the public the opportunity to provide relevant information on the compatibility of the proposed use. The agency is especially interested in information or studies regarding the effects of such a use. All comments received during the comment period will be considered in finalizing the CD.

Copies of the draft CD are available online at: www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/ ; by contacting the Refuge at: (520) 823-4251; or by U.S. Mail to: Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 109, Sassabe, AZ, 85633. Copies of the draft CD are also available at the Green Valley and Arivaca public libraries.

Comments on the draft CD may be sent to the Refuge at the mailing address listed above, faxed to (520) 823-4247; or emailed to: Sally_Gall@fws.gov .

Following consideration of all comments received, a final CD will be issued. If the proposed use is found 'compatible' the Refuge will initiate steps to issue a Special Use Permit to DHS for construction and operation of the towers. If the use is determined 'not compatible' construction of the towers on Refuge lands will not be permitted.

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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