

News Bulletin

Washington Fish & Wildlife Office

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Service Seeks Public Comments on Douglas County Multiple-Species General Conservation Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced it is seeking public comments on a proposed Multiple-Species General Conservation Plan (MSGCP) and a draft Environmental Assessment related to future incidental take permits for agricultural activities in Washington's Douglas County.

The documents describe and assess the impacts of the potential issuance of permits for the likely incidental take (inadvertent harming, killing, disturbance or destruction) of threatened and endangered species resulting from otherwise lawful activities on nonfederal agricultural lands within Douglas County.

A general conservation plan is a habitat conservation plan under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Douglas County MSGCP provides land management guidance for protecting the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, the greater sage-grouse, Washington ground squirrel, and the sharp-tailed grouse, across approximately 879,000 acres of private lands in the county for the next 50 years.

The Service invites the public to comment on the proposed MSGCP and the draft Environmental Assessment. Although landowners are under no obligation to enter into the general conservation plan, the MSGCP would facilitate review and issuance of future incidental take applications. Applying for and receiving a permit under the MSGCP is voluntary, and will allow willing agricultural landowners who agree to carry out certain conservation measures on their lands to receive legal protection for ranching and farming activities under provisions of the ESA. The conservation measures include the development of farm plans and the implementation of best management practices to help avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to the covered species. The draft Environmental Assessment identifies alternatives considered, and compares the alternatives under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The documents are available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Eastern Washington Field Office, 11103 E. Montgomery Dr., Spokane Valley, WA 99206, or at the Foster Creek Conservation District Office, Douglas County Courthouse-3rd Floor, 203 Rainier Street, Waterville, Washington. The public can also find copies on the Service's

website at http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/Douglas_Co_MSGCP/ or request copies by contacting Michelle Eames at the Eastern Washington Field Office, (509) 893-8010.

Today, the Service opened a 60-day public comment period. **Written comments must be received on or before January 13, 2015.**

To request further information or submit written comments, please use one of the following methods, and note that your information request or comment is in reference to the Douglas County Multi-Species General Conservation Plan:

- *Internet:* Documents may be viewed on the internet at http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/Douglas_Co_MSGCP/
- *Email:* FW1DouglasCountyGCP@fws.gov. Include “Douglas County MSGCP” in the subject line.
- *U.S. Mail:* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Eastern Washington Field Office, 11103 E. Montgomery Dr., Spokane Valley, Washington, 99206.
- *In-Person Drop-off, Viewing, or Pickup:* Documents will be available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Eastern Washington Field Office, 11103 E. Montgomery Dr., Spokane Valley, Washington, 99206; and at the Foster Creek Conservation District Office, Douglas County Courthouse-3rd Floor, 203 Rainier Street, Waterville, Washington.
- *Fax:* Eastern Washington Field Office, 509-891-6748, Attn.: Douglas County MSGCP.

For more information about permits and the Endangered Species Act, visit:

<http://www.fws.gov/ENGANGERED/permits/index.html>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit www.fws.gov, or connect with us through any of these social media channels:



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