

estimated population is between 7,000 and 11,000 individuals. Due to habitat loss and degradation throughout the State of Florida, it has been estimated that the Florida scrub-jay population has been reduced by at least half in the last 100 years. Surveys have indicated that eleven families of Florida scrub-jays inhabit the Project site. Construction of the Project's infrastructure and individual home sites will likely result in death of, or injury to, *Aphelocoma coerulescens* incidental to the carrying out of these otherwise lawful activities. Habitat alteration associated with property development will reduce the availability of feeding, shelter, and nesting habitat.

The EA considers the environmental consequences of four alternatives. The no action alternative may result in continued loss of habitat for *Aphelocoma coerulescens* (through lack of fire management activity) or exposure of the Applicant under section 9 of the Act, should he decide to proceed with the Project without incidental take authorization. The on-site scrub habitat restoration alternative would require an ITP and would result in three scrub-jay territories being maintained where they are. In addition, habitat would be restored and/or created to provide for an additional seven FSJ families. However, this alternative would be the riskiest, in that little success has been achieved in the creation of scrub habitat. The off-site mitigation alternative would result in the loss of all eleven families of FSJs on the project site and would provide funds to the state of Florida to allow management activities to take place on the nearby Ross Prairie site specifically for the benefit of scrub-jays. The Applicant rejected this alternative because he wishes to maintain scrub-jays on the Project site as an amenity to future residents. In addition, providing funds to public agencies to conduct management activities would only be useful to scrub-jays in the event there were no plans for the state to manage the site properly. The Service is currently working closely with the state agencies to ensure that such activities will take place without additional funding being provided by the Service. The proposed action alternative is issuance of the ITP with on-site mitigation. To mitigate for the 122 acres of occupied habitat that would be eliminated on-site, the applicant will preserve and manage 273.1 acres of occupied scrub-jay habitat in addition to 32.2 acres of habitat already preserved as a result of previous coordination of a smaller project within the boundaries

of this permit application. To buffer human-related impacts to the proposed preserves, buffers will be placed around them as outlined in the Environmental Assessment. Activities within the refuge areas will be limited to passive recreational activities on designated walkways. These preserves will provide habitat for any eastern indigo snakes occupying the site, as well. In addition, no clearing of scrub vegetation would occur during the nesting season of the Florida scrub-jay. The HCP provides a funding mechanism for these mitigation measures.

As stated above, the Service has made a preliminary determination that the issuance of the ITP is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. This preliminary information may be revised due to public comment received in response to this notice and is based on information contained in the EA and HCP.

The Service will also evaluate whether the issuance of a section 10(a)(1)(B) ITP complies with section 7 of the Act by conducting an intra-Service section 7 consultation. The results of the biological opinion, in combination with the above findings, will be used in the final analysis to determine whether or not to issue the ITP.

Dated: July 21, 1999.

**H. Dale Hall,**

*Acting Regional Director.*

[FR Doc. 99-19238 Filed 7-27-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

#### Information Collection; Request for Comments; AmerAlia, Inc. Proposed Sodium Solution Mine

**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management, USDI.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1978, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intends to complete an Environmental Assessment for AmerAlia, Inc.'s proposed experimental pilot plant nahcolite solution mine. Information will be collected to determine the level of environmental analysis necessary to fulfill BLM's mandate for the environmental protection of lands under their

jurisdiction. Copies of this mine plan are available from AmerAlia, Inc., P.O. Box 1330, Rifle, CO 81650, Telephone (970) 625-9134.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by close of business on or before September 3, 1999.

**ADDRESSES:** All comments should be addressed to Larry M. Shults, Natural Resource Specialist, Bureau of Land Management, White River Field Office, 73544 Highway 64, Meeker, CO 81641, faxed to (970) 878-5717, or sent via e-mail to larry\_shults@co.blm.gov.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Larry M. Shults at (970) 878-3601.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### Background

AmerAlia, Inc., phase one experimental mine plan involves the construction and operation of an experimental pilot plant nahcolite solution mine and associated surface facilities to produce up to 50,000 tons per year (tpy) of sodium bicarbonate for up to a 5 year period. Multiple wells may be used to solution mine the nahcolite. The mining plan being considered involves initially solution mining from alternate production wells. The objectives of the pilot plant are to develop the methods of solution mining and to develop the surface process. If successful, the project could proceed to the commercial phase two operation.

##### Comment Is Invited

The White River Field Office invites comments on the proposed experimental test mine to determine (a) what environmental issues are considered important by the commentor; (b) if an environmental assessment contains sufficient detail for a project of this scope; (c) if an environmental impact statement is necessary for the proposed project.

##### Use of Comment

All comments, including name and address when provided, will become a matter of public record. Comments received in response to this notice will be summarized and used to determine the level of environmental analysis to be conducted on this project.

**John J. Mehlhoff,**

*Resource Area Manager, White River Field Office.*

[FR Doc. 99-19295 Filed 7-27-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-JB-M