

scope of issues to include in the environmental documents.

**DATES:** An open house to begin the public scoping process is scheduled for Saturday, September 21, 2002, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. The Visitor Center is located 5 miles east of Titusville, Florida, on State Route 402. Special mailings, newspaper articles, and announcements will inform the public of times and locations of additional meetings to seek public input. The Service intends to hold at least three meetings during October and November 2002.

**ADDRESSES:** Comment, requests for additional information, and/or requests to be placed on the mailing list should be sent to: Natural Resource Planner, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, P.O. Box 6504, Titusville, Florida 32782-6504; telephone 321/861-2368; fax 321/861-1276. Information concerning this refuge and a mailing list request form may be found at the following Web site: <http://merrittisland.fws.gov>.

If you wish to comment, you may submit your comments by any one of several methods. You may mail comments to the above address. You may also comment via the Internet at the above website. Please submit Internet comments as an ASCII file avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption. Please also include your name and return address in your Internet message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we have received your Internet message, contact the refuge directly at the above phone number or address. Finally, you may hand-deliver comments to the refuge's Visitor Center at the above address. Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** It is the policy of the Fish and Wildlife Service to have all lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System managed in accordance with an approved comprehensive conservation plan. The plan guides management decisions and identifies the goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving refuge purposes. Public input into this planning process is encouraged. The plan will provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the management strategies to be implemented.

The Service has initiated the planning process for Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge for the conservation and enhancement of its natural resources. Covering approximately 140,000 acres and including designations such as Essential Fish Habitat, Outstanding Florida Waters, Great Florida birding Trail Eastern Gateway, Candidate Marine Protected Area, and Brevard County Historic Landmark, the refuge spans Brevard and Volusia Counties and is generally located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Lagoon, near the city of Titusville, Florida.

The Service is especially interested in receiving public input during this planning process. What do you value most about the refuge? What problems or issues do you see affecting management or public use of the refuge? What improvements do you recommend for the refuge? What changes, if any, would you like to see in the management of the refuge? The Service has provided these questions for optional use and has no requirement that information be provided.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

Dated: July 29, 2002.

**Sam D. Hamilton,**

*Regional Director.*

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**BILLING CODE 4310-55-M**

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

#### Notice of Intent To Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Associated NEPA Document for the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and Notice of Public Open Houses

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of Intent to Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Associated National Environmental Policy Act Document for the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Sacramento County, California and Notice of Public Open Houses.

**SUMMARY:** The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is preparing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document for Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (refuge). This notice advises the public that the Service

intends to gather information necessary to prepare a CCP and environmental documents pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, and NEPA. The public is invited to participate in the planning process. The Service is furnishing this notice in compliance with the Service CCP policy to: advise other agencies and the public of our intentions; obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to include in the environmental documents; and announce a series of public scoping meetings to occur in September and October 2002. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for meeting information.

**DATES:** To ensure that the Service has adequate time to evaluate and incorporate suggestions and other input into the planning process, comments should be received within 30 days from the date of this notice.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments or requests to be added to the mailing list to: Planning Team Leader—Stone Lakes NWR, California/Nevada Refuge Planning Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, W-1916, Sacramento, California 95825.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Address comments and requests for additional information to: Mr. Miki Fujitsubo, Planning Team Leader, (916) 414-6507.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is in southern Sacramento County, California, adjacent to the community of Elk Grove. The refuge is situated within the Morrison Creek, Cosumnes River, and Mokelumne River watersheds, and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (Delta).

The beginnings of the refuge started in the early 1970s with the recognition of the importance of the Stone Lakes Basin floodplain by the State of California and the County of Sacramento. There was strong support for a refuge because the unique lakes and waterways of the basin are entirely within the 100-year floodplain. The basin also occupies a strategic location for buffering urban encroachment into the Delta.

The refuge boundary was established in 1992 and with its first land acquisition in 1994 was officially designated the 505th unit in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The approved refuge boundary is 18,000 acres with the refuge currently owning or managing more than 4,000 acres.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, mandates that all lands within the National Wildlife Refuge

System are to be managed in accordance with an approved CCP. The CCP will guide management decisions and identify refuge goals, long-range objectives and management strategies for achieving refuge purposes. The planning process will consider many elements, including habitat and wildlife management, habitat protection, cultural resources, and environmental effects. Public input into this planning process is very important and encouraged. The CCP will provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the desired conditions for the refuges and how the Service will implement management strategies.

The Service is soliciting information from the public via written comments. The Service will send out special mailings, newspaper articles, and announcements to people who are interested in the refuge. These mailings will provide information on how to participate in public involvement for the CCP. Comments received will be used to develop goals, key issues, and habitat management strategies. Additional opportunities for public participation will occur throughout the process. Data collection has been initiated to create computerized mapping, including vegetation, topography, habitat types and existing land uses.

Public open houses have been scheduled for the following dates and locations. All meeting times are from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

1. Monday, September 16, 2002, at the Elk Grove Community Services District Board Room, 8820 Elk Grove Blvd., Elk Grove, CA 95624.
2. Thursday, September 26, 2002, at the Clunie Community Center (Auditorium)—McKinnley Park, 601 Alhambra Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95816.
3. Wednesday, October 2, 2002, at the Jean Harvie Community Center, 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove, CA 95690.
4. Thursday, October 10, 2002, at the Veterans' Memorial Center—(Club Room), 203 East 14th Street—(corner of 14th & B Street), Davis, CA 95616.

The outcome of this planning process will be a CCP to guide the refuge management for the next 15 years. We have estimated that a draft CCP and NEPA document will be made available for public review in early 2004.

Dated: August 19, 2002.

**Ken McDermond,**

*Acting California/Nevada Operations Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento, California.*

[FR Doc. 02-21604 Filed 8-23-02; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 4310-55-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Incidental Take Permit and Habitat Conservation Plan for AT&T Corporation**

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** AT&T Corporation (Applicant) has applied to the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for an incidental take permit pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). The Service proposes to issue a 10-year permit that would authorize take (e.g., harm and harassment) of the endangered Point Arena mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa nigra*) incidental to otherwise lawful activities. Such take would occur as the result of construction to connect an existing fiber optic conduit to the AT&T Point Arena Cable Station located near Manchester, Mendocino County, California.

We request comments from the public on the permit application which includes a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the Point Arena mountain beaver. We also request comments on our preliminary determination that the HCP qualifies as a "low-effect" habitat conservation plan, eligible for a categorical exclusion from additional documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act.

**DATES:** Written comments should be received on or before September 25, 2002.

**ADDRESSES:** Send written comments to Mr. Bruce G. Halstead, Project Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1655 Heindon Road, Arcata, California, 95521. Comments may also be sent by facsimile to (707) 822-8411.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mr. John Hunter, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at the above address or call (707) 822-7201.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Document Availability**

The permit application, HCP, and the Service's low-effect HCP screening form are available for public review. The HCP describes the proposed project and the measures that the Applicant would undertake to minimize and mitigate take of Point Arena mountain beavers. The screening form describes the basis for the Service's preliminary determination that the HCP qualifies as a low effect plan eligible for a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Please contact the above office if you would like copies of the application, HCP and screening form. Documents will also be available for review, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address. All comments we receive, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record and may be released to the public.

**Background**

Section 9 of the Act and Federal regulations prohibit the "take" of fish and wildlife species listed as endangered or threatened. Take of listed fish or wildlife is defined under the Act to include kill, harm, or harass. The Service may, under limited circumstances, issue permits to authorize incidental take; *i.e.*, take that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, otherwise lawful activity. Regulations governing incidental take permits for threatened and endangered species are found in 50 CFR 17.32 and 50 CFR 17.22, respectively.

The Applicant has applied to the Service for a section 10(a)(1)(B) incidental take permit for the point Arena mountain beaver, on the AT&T Point Arena Cable Station, in Mendocino County, California. The term of the permit would be 10 years. The AT&T Cable Station consists of 11.2 acres of privately-owned land located approximately 1 mile northwest of the town of Manchester. Prior to the listing of the Point Arena mountain beaver, three 5-inch-diameter steel bore pipes were installed below the surface of the ground from a point offshore of the cable station in the Pacific Ocean to a point about 88 feet from the north side of the cable station building. An occupied Point Arena mountain beaver burrow system is located 30 feet north from the end of the bore pipes. The Applicant proposes to install an access vault at this location, trench and bury cable conduit for 77 feet, and then install a manhole at the end of the cable conduit. The Applicant may then utilize this system by placing fiber optic cables in these pipes and conduits. The Service considers this project to entail take of Point Arena mountain beaver since noise and vibration disturbance and habitat loss will occur near occupied burrows.

The AT&T Cable Station is composed of structures, a parking lot, access roads, occupied Point Arena mountain beaver habitat and unoccupied potential habitat. The occupied, and some of the unoccupied, habitat consists of stabilized dunes dominated by bush lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*) and other coastal scrub and coastal strand species