

Estimation of the total numbers of hours needed to prepare the information collection including number of respondents, frequency of response, and hours of response:

Number of respondents: 63,387.

Estimated Responses per Respondent: 1 every two years.

Time per respondent: 33 minutes.

Total hours to respond: 35,169.

Respondent's Obligation: Voluntary.

Status of the proposed information collection: Pending OMB approval.

Authority: Title 13 U.S.C. Section 9(a), and Title 12, U.S.C., Section 1701z-1 *et seq.*

Dated: January 16, 2003.

Christopher D. Lord,

Deputy Assistant, Secretary for Policy Development.

[FR Doc. 03-1691 Filed 1-24-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4210-62-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of the Secretary

Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group; Notice of Renewal

This notice is published in accordance with section 9(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Public Law 92-463). Following consultation with the General Services Administration, notice is hereby given that the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) is renewing the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group. The purpose of the Adaptive Management Work Group is to advise and provide recommendations to the Secretary with respect to her responsibility to comply with the Grand Canyon Protection Act of October 30, 1992, embodied in Public Law 102-575.

Further information regarding the advisory council may be obtained from the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW., Washington, DC 20240.

The certification of renewal is published below.

Certification

I hereby certify that renewal of the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group is in the public interest in connection with the purpose of duties imposed on the Department of the Interior by 30 U.S.C. 1-8.

Dated: January 22, 2003.

Gale A. Norton,

Secretary of the Interior.

[FR Doc. 03-1792 Filed 1-24-03; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Scoping Meetings and Intent To Prepare an Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Designation of an Experimental Population of Northern Aplomado Falcon

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: We, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), are providing this notice to advise the public that a draft environmental assessment will be prepared, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 432 *et seq.*), in conjunction with a proposed rule to establish, under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), an experimental population of northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*) in New Mexico and Arizona. We will hold five public informational sessions and scoping meetings (*see DATES and ADDRESSES* sections).

Through this notice and the public scoping meetings, we are seeking comments or suggestions from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning the scope of the environmental analysis, including the alternatives that should be analyzed.

DATES: Comments may be submitted directly to the Service (*see ADDRESSES* section) by February 11, 2003, or at any of the five scoping meetings to be held in February 2003. Meetings will include an informational session and a subsequent scoping meeting.

We will hold public informational sessions and scoping meetings at the following dates and times:

1. February 3, 2003

Douglas, AZ

Informational session: 5:30 p.m.

Scoping meeting: 7 p.m.

2. February 4, 2003

Deming, NM

Informational session: 5:30 p.m.

Scoping meeting: 7 p.m.

3. February 5, 2003:

Alamogordo, NM

Informational session: 5:30 p.m.

Scoping meeting: 7 p.m.

4. February 6, 2003

Carlsbad, NM

Informational session: 5:30 p.m.

Scoping meeting: 7:30 p.m.

5. February 11, 2003

Socorro, NM

Informational session: 5:30 p.m.

Scoping meeting: 7 p.m.

ADDRESSES:

Meetings

The public informational sessions and scoping meetings will be held at the following locations:

1. Douglas, AZ: Cochise College-Little Theatre, 4190 West State Highway 80; (520) 417-4143.

2. Deming, NM: Deming High School Auditorium, 1100 S. Nickel; (505) 546-8126.

3. Alamogordo, NM: Alamogordo Civic Center, 800 East 1st Street; (505) 439-4142.

4. Carlsbad, NM: New Mexico State University at Carlsbad-Instructional Building, Room 153, 1500 University Drive; (505) 234-9444.

5. Socorro, NM: New Mexico Tech-Main Auditorium, Macey Center, 801 Leroy Place; (505) 835-5342.

Information, comments, or questions related to preparation of the draft environmental assessment and the NEPA process should be submitted to Joy Nicholopoulos, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, 2105 Osuna NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87113. Written comments may also be sent by facsimile to (505) 346-2542 or by e-mail to R2FWE_AL@fws.gov. All comments, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record and may be released.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Questions regarding the scoping process, preparation of the draft environmental assessment, or the development of a proposed rule designating an experimental population may be directed to Carrie Chalcraft at telephone number (505) 346-2525.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*) is a widespread but sparsely distributed species through the Americas. Ranging from near the Mexican border south to Argentina, the aplomado falcon is a fast-flying predator that feeds upon medium-sized birds, insects, rodents, bats, and reptiles; pairs often hunt cooperatively. The northern subspecies (*F.f. septentrionalis*) was widespread throughout southwestern grasslands prior to the 1930s (Hector 1981, 2000). It was regarded as fairly common throughout the humid coastal

savannas of Texas and Tamaulipas and the drier interior grasslands. Numerous egg sets were collected in southern Texas between 1888 and 1915 (Hector 1981).

Populations of the northern aplomado falcon began to decline during the first half of the twentieth century. Prior to reintroduction efforts in Texas, the last known breeding of this species within the United States occurred near Deming, New Mexico, in 1952. Breeding pairs became established in Texas once again in 1995, as a result of reintroduction efforts. There have been no verified sightings of northern aplomado falcons in Arizona since 1940 (Philips *et al.* 1964). Sightings of northern aplomado falcons have continued in New Mexico since the 1950s, but with only a handful of unconfirmed sightings per decade from the 1970s and 1980s despite many searches by ornithologists. The frequency of sightings ranged from 1 to 6 confirmed sightings per year throughout the 1990s. These sightings were followed by an unsuccessful nesting attempt in New Mexico in 2001, and the successful fledging of 3 nestlings from a nest in 2002.

There remains some debate concerning the exact cause of the decline of the northern aplomado falcon. Hypotheses implicating habitat loss, pesticide use, climatic change, egg and skin collecting, disease, and others have been advanced. We may therefore never fully understand the chain of events that led to the virtual extirpation of this species throughout the northernmost portion of its range (Cade *et al.* 1991). Unquestionably, grassland savannas in the southwestern United States underwent a substantial physical change during the decline of the northern aplomado falcon. Naturally occurring range fires maintained the humid grasslands of coastal Texas and Tamaulipas, once known as the "Wild Horse Prairie." By World War II much of that prairie had been tilled into crops, and, with the control of range fires, what prairie remained soon became overgrown with brush species such as Honey Mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), Blackbrush Acacia (*Acacia rigidula*), Huisache (*Acacia smallii*), and Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) (Bogusch 1952). Brush encroachment may have increased the density of the great-horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), a principal predator of falcons. Already greatly reduced in number and isolated through habitat loss, the remaining falcons may have been eliminated by the widespread use of organochlorines in agriculture (Kiff *et al.* 1980).

The decline of the northern aplomado falcon in the drier grasslands of west

Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona may have resulted from different causes. Grasslands then were substantially altered both by farming and by intense overgrazing that reached its peak during 1870–1890 (Hastings and Turner 1965). The latter is believed to have reduced the diversity of the native short grass prairie. In time, these grasslands likely became less productive for the bird species upon which falcons preyed.

We listed the northern aplomado falcon as an endangered species in 1986 and published a Recovery Plan in 1990. As of September 2002, at least 37 pairs of falcons have become established in Texas as a result of release efforts. Monitoring efforts in northern Mexico indicate a population of 30–35 naturally occurring pairs currently exists in northern Chihuahua.

An active release effort is currently ongoing in both south and west Texas. The Peregrine Fund, a nonprofit, nongovernmental conservation organization, began recovery efforts during 1978–1988 when 25 young falcons were collected from nests in Mexico to establish a captive breeding program. The Peregrine Fund conducted a pilot release project during 1985–1989, and restoration began on a larger scale in 1993 with modified hacking procedures developed from Peregrine Falcon reintroduction. Although captive propagation of this species has been challenging, The Peregrine Fund has released 813 captive-bred falcons into Texas by the "hacking method." As of spring 2002, 37 established pairs have successfully fledged more than 92 young in a region where this species had been absent for over 50 years. Releases are being conducted on private property under a Safe Harbor Agreement enrolling 1.4 million acres in south and west Texas.

Experimental Populations

We are committed to the long-term recovery of the northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*) in accordance with the recommendations of the 1990 recovery plan for this species. One of the primary goals of the Northern Aplomado Falcon Recovery Plan is to "Reestablish the northern aplomado falcon in the U.S. and Mexico." Use of our authorities under section 10(j) of the Act (described below) may be a useful tool to achieve this recovery goal in Arizona and New Mexico. The purpose of this scoping process is to aid the development of an environmental assessment by collecting comments on this alternative as well as developing other alternatives that are consistent with the species' Recovery Plan.

Congress made significant changes to the Act in 1982 with addition of section 10(j), which provides for the designation of specific reintroduced populations of listed species as "experimental populations." Previously, we had authority to reintroduce populations into unoccupied portions of a listed species' historical range when doing so would foster the conservation and recovery of the species. However, local citizens often opposed these reintroductions because they were concerned about placement of restrictions and prohibitions on Federal and private activities. Under section 10(j), the Secretary of the Department of the Interior can designate reintroduced populations established outside the species' current range, but within its historical range, as "experimental." On the basis of the best available information, we must determine whether an experimental population is "essential" or "nonessential" to the continued existence of the species. Regulatory restrictions are considerably reduced under a Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP) designation.

Under the Act, species listed as endangered or threatened are afforded protection primarily through the prohibitions of section 9 and the requirements of section 7. Section 9 of the Act prohibits the take of endangered wildlife. "Take" is defined by the Act as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. Service regulations (50 CFR 17.31) generally extend the prohibition of take to threatened wildlife. Section 7 of the Act outlines the procedures for Federal interagency cooperation to conserve federally listed species and protect designated critical habitats. It mandates all Federal agencies to determine how to use their existing authorities to further the purposes of the Act to aid in recovering listed species. It also states that Federal agencies will, in consultation with the Service, ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. Section 7 of the Act does not affect activities undertaken on private lands unless they are authorized, funded, or carried out by a Federal agency.

For purposes of section 9 of the Act, a population designated as experimental is treated as threatened regardless of the species' designation elsewhere in its range. Through section 4(d) of the Act, threatened designation allows us greater

discretion in devising management programs and special regulations for such a population. Section 4(d) of the Act allows us to adopt whatever regulations are necessary to provide for the conservation of a threatened species. In these situations, the general regulations that extend most section 9 prohibitions to threatened species do not apply to that species, and the special 4(d) rule contains the prohibitions and exemptions necessary and appropriate to conserve that species. Regulations issued under section 4(d) for NEPs are usually more compatible with routine human activities in the reintroduction area.

For the purposes of section 7 of the Act, we treat NEPs as threatened species when the NEP is located within a National Wildlife Refuge or National Park, and section 7(a)(1) and the consultation requirements of section 7(a)(2) of the Act apply. Section 7(a)(1) requires all Federal agencies to use their authorities to conserve listed species. Section 7(a)(2) requires that Federal agencies, in consultation with the Service, ensure any actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or adversely modify its critical habitat. When NEPs are located outside a National Wildlife Refuge or National Park, we treat the population as proposed for listing and only two provisions of section 7 would apply—section 7(a)(1) and section 7(a)(4). In these instances, NEPs provide additional flexibility because Federal agencies are not required to consult with us under section 7(a)(2). Section 7(a)(4) requires Federal agencies to confer with the Service on actions that are likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species. The results of a conference are advisory in nature and do not restrict agencies from carrying out, funding, or authorizing activities.

Individuals used to establish an experimental population may come from a donor population, provided their removal will not create adverse impacts upon the parent population, and provided appropriate permits are issued in accordance with our regulations (50 CFR 17.22) prior to their removal.

In order to establish an experimental population, we must issue a proposed regulation and consider public comments on the proposed rule prior to publishing a final regulation. In addition, we must comply with NEPA. Also, our regulations require that, to the extent practicable, a regulation issued under section 10(j) of the Act represents an agreement between the Service, the affected State and Federal agencies, and

persons holding any interest in land that may be affected by the establishment of the experimental population (see 50 CFR § 17.81(d)).

We have not yet identified possible alternatives for accomplishing our recovery goals in Arizona and New Mexico and we do not know what the preferred alternative (the proposed action) or other alternatives might entail. Once identified, the alternatives will be carried forward into detailed analyses pursuant to NEPA.

Any process to release falcons as “experimental” will require that we: (1) Compile and analyze all new biological information on the species; (2) review and update the administrative record; (3) review the overall approach to the conservation and recovery of the falcon in the United States; (4) review available information that pertains to the habitat requirements of this species, including material received during the public comment period from this notice and comments on the listing; (5) review actions identified in the northern aplomado falcon recovery plan (Service 1990); (6) determine what areas, if any, might require special management or areas that should be excluded from the experimental population area; (7) write a draft environmental assessment and present alternatives to the public for review and comment; (8) incorporate public input and use current knowledge of falcon habitat use and availability to precisely map a proposed experimental population area; (9) present this proposal in a proposed rule for publication in the **Federal Register** and solicit comments from the public; and (10) finalize the environmental assessment and the rule designating an experimental population and identifying an experimental population area, and authorizing the release of falcons as experimental in New Mexico and Arizona, or adopt the no action alternative and not permit the release of northern aplomado falcons as experimental in these areas.

We are the lead Federal agency for compliance with NEPA for this action. The draft environmental assessment will incorporate public concerns in the analysis of impacts associated with the proposed action and associated project alternatives. The draft environmental assessment will be sent out for a minimum 30-day public review period, during which time comments will be solicited on the adequacy of the document. The final environmental document (e.g., environmental assessment or environmental impact statement) will address the comments we receive during public review and will be furnished to all who commented

on the draft environmental assessment, and made available to anyone who requests a copy. This notice is provided pursuant to regulations for implementing NEPA.

Public Comments Solicited

The Service wishes to ensure that any proposed rulemaking to designate an experimental population for the aplomado falcon we might issue and the draft environmental assessment on the proposed action effectively evaluate all potential issues associated with this action. Therefore, we request comments or recommendations concerning reasons why any particular area should or should not be included in an experimental population designation, information on the distribution and quality of habitat for the northern aplomado falcons, land or water use practices and current or planned activities in areas that may be affected by a designation of an experimental population, and any other pertinent issues of concern. We seek comment from the public, as well as Tribal, local, State, and Federal government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party. To promulgate a proposed rule to establish an experimental population for the aplomado falcon and to determine whether to prepare a finding of no significant impact or an environmental impact statement, we will take into consideration all comments and any additional information received.

We will give separate notice of the availability of the draft environmental assessment, when completed, so that interested and affected people may comment on the draft and have input into the final decision. The draft environmental assessment will undergo a minimum 30-day public comment period.

References

- Bogusch, E.R. 1952. Brush invasion in the Rio Grande plain of Texas. *Texas J. Science*. Pp. 85–91.
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- Hastings, J.R., and R.M. Turner. 1965. The changing mile: An ecological study of vegetation change with time in the lower mile of an arid and semiarid region. Univ. of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona. 317pp.
- Hector, D.P. 1981. The habitat, diet, and foraging behavior of the aplomado falcon, (*Falco femoralis*)(Temminck). M.S. Thesis, Oklahoma State

University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. 189 pp.

Keddy-Hector, D.P. 2000. Aplomado Falcon (*Falco femoralis*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 549 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

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Phillips, A., J. Marshall, and G. Monson. 1964. *The birds of Arizona*. Univ. Arizona Press, Tucson.

Dated: January 15, 2003.

Craig Manson,

Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

[FR Doc. 03-1943 Filed 1-23-03; 4:07 pm]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Land Use Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Arizona State Office.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a Land Use Plan Amendment (LUP) and Environmental Assessment (EA).

SUMMARY: This document provides notice that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona (AZ) State Office intends to prepare an Arizona Statewide Land Use Plan Amendment to incorporate current fire management policy and to prepare an Environmental Assessment that will amend seven land use plans. These plans are: Arizona Strip District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1992), Kingman RMP (1995), Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1983), Lower Gila South RMP (1988), Phoenix RMP (1989), Safford RMP (1992 and 1994) and Yuma RMP (1986 and 1987). The purpose of the Arizona Statewide LUP Amendment is to establish consistent methods of managing Arizona wildland fire across the state and among the various agencies and groups who participate in wildland fire fighting, ecology, and management, while at the same time allowing appropriate and fire-safe enjoyment of BLM-administered lands in Arizona. The amendment will result in a consistent approach to incorporating the National Fire Policy in land use plans.

This planning activity encompasses approximately 12 million surface acres of public land. The action is being conducted under the authority of BLM Planning Regulation 43 CFR, 1610 and will fulfill the needs and obligations set forth by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and BLM management policies. This collaborative process will take into account local, regional, and national needs and concerns by involving other federal agencies, Native American tribes, conservation groups, recreationists, the public, and other stakeholders throughout the planning process.

This plan amendment will analyze fires and fuels management actions and their impacts on the human environment for the seven BLM field offices in one document in order to ensure consistency and collaboration of the interested publics. An EA-level analysis and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are anticipated, followed with an approved plan amendment and Decision Record (DR).

DATES: The public comment period commences with the publication of this notice. Public meetings will be held throughout the plan scoping and preparation period and will tentatively be held in February and March of 2003. In order to ensure local community participation and input, BLM will rotate public meetings among towns in the planning area, which include the metro-Phoenix, Kingman, Lake Havasu, Yuma, Tucson, and Safford, Arizona; and St. George, Utah. BLM encourages early participation by all those interested so that they can determine the future management of the public lands. At least 15 days public notice will be given for activities where the public is invited to attend, and meetings and comment deadlines will be announced through the local news media, newsletters, and the BLM Web site (<http://www.az.blm.gov>). The minutes and list of attendees for each meeting will be available to the public and open for 30 days to any participant who wishes to clarify the views they expressed. Written comments will be accepted throughout the planning process. In addition to the ongoing public participation process, formal opportunities for public participation will be provided upon publication of the EA.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to: AZ LUP Fire, Fuels and Air Quality Amendment Planning, Bureau of Land Management, 222 North Central, Phoenix, AZ 85002-2203. Use

the above address to mail or hand-deliver written comments; additionally, comments can be faxed to (928) 692-4414. Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the BLM Arizona State Office at the above address during regular business hours, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays, and may be published as part of the EA. Documents relevant to the planning effort may be examined during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, at the BLM Arizona State Office at the above address. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: For further information and/or to have your name added to our mailing list, contact Sherry Hirst, Kingman Field Office, 2475 Beverly Avenue, Kingman, AZ 86401, telephone (928) 692-4435.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: During the planning process, the BLM will consider appropriate management response to wildland fires as well as how prescribed fire can be used to help achieve resource objectives and to reduce dangerous accumulations of hazardous fuels. The amendment will emphasize appropriate response to wildland fires based on a consideration of firefighter and public safety, threats to private property, anticipated suppression costs, resource values at risk, resource benefits, the return of fire as a process to ecosystems, public attitudes and behavior regarding wildland fire hazards, and political and social concerns. Other issues that will be addressed include: hazardous fuels as an issue, and the use of prescribed fire, mechanical treatment, and/or chemical treatment(s) to reduce and/or manage hazardous fuels; hazardous fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and associated issues, and the various tools to approach these issues; appropriate management response, including managing natural fire starts for resource benefit; a statewide programmatic emergency fire rehabilitation plan; and air quality analysis.