

CCP describes how the Service intends to manage these refuges over the next 15 years.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the CCP are available on compact disk or in hard copy, and can be obtained by writing: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Carol Torrez, Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87103-1306.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Harold Beierman, Refuge Manager, Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 549, Muleshoe, Texas 79347; telephone: (806) 946-3341; or Carol Torrez, Biologist/Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87103-1306; telephone: (505)248-6821; e-mail: carol_torrez@fws.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A CCP is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*). The purpose in developing CCPs is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife science, conservation, legal mandates, and Service policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, the CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. These CCPs will be reviewed and updated at least every 15 years in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*), and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Dated: May 3, 2004.

David Yazzie,

Acting Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Draft Recovery Plan for *Phlox hirsuta* (Yreka Phlox)

AGENCY: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability for review and comment.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("we") announces the availability of the Draft Recovery Plan for *Phlox hirsuta* (Yreka Phlox) for public review and comment.

DATES: Comments on the draft recovery plan must be received on or before October 18, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the draft recovery plan are available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the following location: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yreka Fish and Wildlife Office, 1829 South Oregon Street, Yreka, California (telephone (530) 842-5763). Requests for copies of the draft recovery plan and written comments and materials regarding this plan should be addressed to Phil Detrich, Field Supervisor, at the above Yreka address. An electronic copy of the draft revised recovery plan is also available at: <http://endangered.fws.gov/recovery/index.html#plans>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nadine Kanim, Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at the above Yreka address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Recovery of endangered or threatened animals and plants is a primary goal of our endangered species program and the Endangered Species Act (Act) 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). Recovery means improvement of the status of listed species to the point at which listing is no longer appropriate under the criteria set out in section 4(a)(1) of the Act. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for the conservation of the species, establish criteria for downlisting or delisting listed species, and estimate time and cost for implementing the measures needed for recovery.

The Act requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Section 4(f) of the Act requires that public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. We will consider all information presented during the public comment period prior to approval of each new or revised

recovery plan. Substantive technical comments may result in changes to the recovery plan. Substantive comments regarding recovery plan implementation may not necessarily result in changes to the recovery plan, but will be forwarded to appropriate Federal or other entities so that they can take these comments into account during the course of implementing recovery actions. Individual responses to comments will not be provided.

Phlox hirsuta is a narrow endemic plant known only from the vicinity of Yreka, California. Only four populations, separated by a minimum of 0.88 kilometers (0.55 miles), are currently known to occur. Distribution within these occurrences ranges from scattered plants to numerous discrete sub-occurrences. *Phlox hirsuta* occurs on lands owned and managed by the City of Yreka, the U. S. Forest Service, the California Department of Transportation, industrial timber companies, and private landowners.

The goal of this recovery plan is to establish criteria necessary to accomplish downlisting and eventually delisting of the species. The criteria for downlisting to threatened status are that: (1) four occurrences (two of which must be the China Hill and Soap Creek Ridge occurrences) have secure permanent protection (legally-binding arrangements that ensure management for the benefit of *Phlox hirsuta* in perpetuity); and (2) a *Phlox hirsuta* seed bank and effective propagation techniques have been established. The criteria for delisting are that: (1) the reclassification criteria for downlisting have been met; and (2) two additional occurrences have been located and permanently protected, or 10 years of demographic research and/or quantitative monitoring at four protected occurrences has indicated that plant population size has not declined more than 10 percent at any occurrence (total change between year 0 and year 10).

Public Comments Solicited

We solicit written comments on this draft recovery plan described. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered in developing a final recovery plan.

Authority: The authority for this action is section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: April 21, 2004.

Paul Henson,

*Acting Manager, California/Nevada
Operations Office, Region 1, U.S. Fish and
Wildlife Service.*

[FR Doc. 04-16345 Filed 7-16-04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Associated Environmental Assessment for Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in Cameron and Willacy Counties, TX

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

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intends to gather information necessary to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and environmental documents pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations, for Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) headquartered near Rio Hondo, Texas. The Refuge is located in Cameron and Willacy Counties and includes the Bahia Grande and South Padre Island Units.

The Service is issuing this Notice in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*):

(1) To advise other agencies, organizations and the public of our intentions, and

(2) To obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to be considered in the planning process.

DATES: Special mailings, newspaper articles, postings, and media announcements will inform people of opportunities for written input throughout the CCP planning process. Refuge fact sheets will be made available at local libraries in the surrounding communities. This notice of intent/public scoping process will continue until October 18, 2004. Written comments submitted by mail or e-mail should be postmarked by that date to ensure consideration. Comments mailed after that date will be considered to the extent practical. Inquire at the following address for future dates of planning activity and due dates for comments.

ADDRESSES: Address comments and requests for more information to: John

Wallace, Refuge Manager, Laguna Atascosa NWR, CCP-Project, P.O. Box 450, Rio Hondo, TX 78583, phone: (956) 748-3607, fax: (956) 748-3609.

Information concerning this Refuge may be also found at the following Web site: <http://southwest.fws.gov>.

Comments submitted via e-mail should be addressed to Chris Perez at Chris_Perez@fws.gov or John Wallace at John_Wallace@fws.gov. Additionally, you may hand-deliver comments to Mr. Wallace at the Refuge, 16 miles east on Highway 106 from Rio Hondo, Texas. Our practice is to make comments, including names and addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the rulemaking record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Chris Perez, Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 requires that all lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) be managed in accordance with an approved CCP. The CCP guides management decisions and identifies refuge goals, long-range objectives and strategies for achieving refuge purposes. Each Refuge in the NWRS has specific purposes for which it was established. Those purposes are used to develop and prioritize management goals and objectives within the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and to guide which public uses will occur on a given refuge.

The planning process will consider many elements, including habitat and wildlife management, habitat protection and acquisition, wilderness preservation, public recreational opportunities, industrial use and cultural resources. Public input into this planning process is essential. The planning process is a way for the Service and the public to evaluate refuge management goals and objectives for the best possible conservation efforts of this important wildlife habitat. Concurrently, this process is also providing for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities that are compatible with each Refuges establishing purposes and the mission of the NWRS.

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge is located in Cameron and Willacy counties, Texas and encompasses 86,905 acres of coastal prairie, lomas (clay ridges), resacas (oxbow lakes), native thornbrush, tidal

saltflat, barrier island habitats and salt and freshwater marshes. The CCP will provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the desired conditions for the Refuge and how the Service will implement management strategies for the conservation and development of these natural resources.

The Service, through this notice of intent, formally begins the comprehensive conservation planning process for Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The Service requests input on any and all issues concerning management or public recreation. Comments regarding the protection of threatened and/or endangered species, migratory birds, native species and their habitats are encouraged. The Service is equally interested in receiving public input in the following areas:

- What makes this Refuge special for you?
- What Refuge projects or activities interest you most?
- 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 the above questions for optional use only. The Planning Team developed these questions to facilitate issues and ideas. Comments received will be used as part of the planning process. Individual comments will not be referenced in our reports or directly responded to.

The Service will continue to solicit information from the public and other agencies via open houses, meetings, and written comments. Special mailings, newspaper releases, and announcements will continue to inform people of the time and place of opportunities for further input to the CCP.

Review of this project will be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), NEPA Regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508) found at (<http://www.legal.gsa.gov>), other appropriate Federal laws, and Service policies and procedures for compliance with those regulations.

The Service will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with procedures for implementing NEPA found in the Department of the Interior Manual (DM Part 516, Chap 6). The decision to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement instead of an EA is contingent