

Riverside County, currently the fastest growing county in the state, will continue to grow to 3.5 million people by 2030 and 4.5 million people by 2040.

The Draft MSHCP plan area encompasses approximately 1.1 million acres in the Coachella Valley and includes the following 9 incorporated cities: Cathedral City, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, and Rancho Mirage. It is one of two large, multiple-jurisdictional habitat planning efforts in Riverside County, each of which constitutes a "subregional" plan under the State of California's Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Act, as amended.

As described in the Draft MSHCP and the Draft EIR/EIS, the proposed MSHCP would provide for the creation of a reserve system that protects and manages approximately 725,780 acres of habitat for the Covered Species, including approximately 538,000 acres of existing conservation lands as of 2003 (482,000 acres as of 1996), 98,100 acres conserved as the local mitigation component as of 2003 (100,600 acres as of 1996), and 10,800 acres of other non-permittee public and quasi-public lands to be conserved. It is anticipated that as of 2003, 31,250 acres will be acquired by State and Federal agencies independent of the MSHCP (39,850 acres as of 1996). The financing plan for the local portion of the reserve assembly as of 2003 addresses 90,600 acres and includes a mitigation fee, tipping fee for use of waste management facilities, transportation mitigation fees, and other funding sources.

The Draft MSHCP identifies the proposed reserve system which will be established from lands within 21 conservation areas that are either adjacent or linked by biological corridors. The acquisition program for the reserve system, involving conservation of 140,150 acres is anticipated to occur over the first 30 years of the permit. When completed, the reserve system will include core habitat for Covered Species, essential ecological processes, and biological corridors and linkages to provide for the conservation of the proposed Covered Species.

The Draft MSHCP includes measures to avoid and minimize incidental take of the Covered Species, emphasizing project design modifications to protect both habitats and species' individuals. A monitoring and reporting plan would gauge the MSHCP's success based on achievement of biological goals and objectives and would ensure that conservation keeps pace with development. The Draft MSHCP also

includes a management program, including adaptive management, which allows for changes in the conservation program if the biological species objectives are not met, or new information becomes available to improve the efficacy of the MSHCP's conservation strategy.

Covered Activities would include public and private development within the plan area that requires certain ministerial and discretionary actions by a permittee subject to consistency with MSHCP policies, regional transportation facilities, maintenance of and safety improvements on existing roads, the Circulation Elements of the permittees, maintenance and construction of flood control facilities, and compatible uses in the reserve. The Draft MSHCP makes a provision for the inclusion of special districts and other non-permittee entities in the permit with a certificate of inclusion.

The Public Use and Trails Plan element of the Draft MSHCP provides for coordinated management of trails on public lands involving members of the public, local jurisdictions, and State and other Federal agencies. The *Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges, California* (USFWS 2000) recommends development and implementation of an interagency trails management plan to reduce or eliminate detrimental human activities within bighorn sheep habitat. The *California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley* (December 2002) prescribes a combination of methods to avoid, reduce, or mitigate disturbance to bighorn sheep, including voluntary avoidance programs, closures, seasonal restrictions, and permit stipulations and mitigations.

The Draft EIR/EIS analyzes five other alternatives in addition to the proposed MSHCP Preferred Project Alternative described above including: an alternative that would not include the City of Palm Springs; an alternative that includes all existing local, State, and Federal agency land and private conservation land with additional management prescriptions; an alternative that protects core habitat, ecological processes, and biological corridors with less land than the preferred alternative; an expanded conservation alternative; and a no project alternative.

Pursuant to the June 10, 2004, order in *Spirit of the Sage Council v. Norton*, Civil Action No. 98-1873 (D. D.C.), the Service is enjoined from approving new section 10(a)(1)(B) permits or related documents containing "No Surprises" assurances until such time as the

Service adopts new permit revocation rules specifically applicable to section 10(a)(1)(B) permits in compliance with the public notice and comment requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act. This notice concerns a step in the review and processing of a section 10(a)(1)(B) permit and any subsequent permit issuance will be in accordance with the Court's order. Until such time as the Service's authority to issue permits with "No Surprises" assurances has been reinstated, the Service will not approve any incidental take permits or related documents that contain "No Surprises" assurances.

#### Public Comments

The Service and CVAG invite the public to comment on the Draft MSHCP, Draft Implementing Agreement, and Draft EIR/EIS during a 90-day public comment period beginning the date of this notice. The comment period is opened for 90 days to eliminate the need for an extension subsequent to the close of the comment period. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be made available to the public. This notice is provided pursuant to section 10(a) of the Act and Service regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (40 CFR 1506.6). The Service will evaluate the application, associated documents, and comments submitted thereon to prepare a Final EIS. A permit decision will be made no sooner than 30 days after the publication of the Final EIS and completion of the Record of Decision.

Dated: October 22, 2004.

**Russell Joe Bellmer,**  
Acting Deputy Manager, California/Nevada Operations Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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#### DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

##### Bureau of Land Management

[ID-070-2824-DS-PJ04]

##### Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Draft Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement

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

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** The Upper Snake River District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), located in south-

central and eastern Idaho, has prepared a Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Draft Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft Plan Amendment/EIS) to consider management direction for fire, fuels, and related uses of vegetation. This planning process is in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (USDI *et al.* 1995, reviewed and updated in 2001). The Draft Plan Amendment/EIS is available for public review and comment.

**DATES:** Written comments will be accepted for 90 days following the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes this Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**. Future meetings and any other opportunities for public involvement will be announced at least 15 days in advance through public notices, media news releases, and/or mailings. In addition, information on public meetings will be posted on the Internet at <http://www.id.blm.gov/planning/fmda/index.htm>. To receive full consideration, comments must be postmarked no later than the last day of the written comment period. (The last day of the written comment period will be also be identified in the internet address above, after publication of the Notice in the **Federal Register**.)

**ADDRESSES:** Copies of the Draft Plan Amendment/EIS are available upon request from the Pocatello Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 4350 Cliffs Drive, Pocatello, Idaho 83204, phone 208-478-6340, or at <http://www.id.blm.gov/planning/fmda/index.htm> via the Internet. You may submit written comments on the draft document by any of the following methods:

- **Mail:** FMDA Planning Team, Pocatello Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 4350 Cliffs Drive, Pocatello, Idaho 83204.
- **E-mail:** [ID\\_USRD\\_FMDA@blm.gov](mailto:ID_USRD_FMDA@blm.gov).
- **Fax:** 208-478-6376.

All public comments, including the names and mailing addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the BLM Pocatello Field Office, in Pocatello, Idaho during regular business hours from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays, and may be published as part of the final plan amendment/EIS. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, please state

this prominently at the beginning of your written correspondence. The BLM will honor such requests 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 CONTACT:** Eric Limbach, FMDA Project Manager, 4350 Cliffs Drive, Pocatello, Idaho 83204, phone 208-478-6392, e-mail [Eric\\_Limbach@blm.gov](mailto:Eric_Limbach@blm.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Draft Plan Amendment/EIS was developed with broad public participation through a three year collaborative planning process. It addresses management on approximately 5.4 million acres of public land in the Upper Snake River District of the BLM, comprising the Burley, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and Shoshone Field Offices in south-central and eastern Idaho.

The Draft Plan Amendment/EIS would incorporate the National Fire Plan's Cohesive Strategy and the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy into existing BLM land use plans. The draft EIS displays the environmental effects of implementing those amended plans.

The purpose of the proposed fire management plan amendment is to:

- Establish fire management guidance, objectives, policies, and management actions;
- Identify resource goals and methods, including desired future condition of the fire-related vegetation resources, and management actions necessary to achieve objectives;
- Form the basis to update fire management plans and integrate them with allotment management plans, wildlife management plans, recreation management plans, Idaho Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing, and other applicable plans, to the greatest extent possible; and
- Provide LUP level direction to enable incremental steps toward a long-term resource goal of conditions that minimize risk to human life and property and maintain or restore vegetation that is resistant to catastrophic wildfire.

Four alternatives are analyzed. Alternative A, the No Action alternative, reflects current Land Use Plan direction, emphasizes wildland fire suppression, and minimizes the use of wildland fire for resource benefit. Alternative B emphasizes the increased use of fire,

including prescribed fire and wildland fire use to more closely approximate the historical role of fire and prepare sites for restoration treatments. Alternative C would fully implement the Cohesive Strategy from the National Fire Plan (treats more acres with prescribed fire than the other alternatives). Alternative D, the Preferred Alternative, focuses on maintaining or restoring the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and its associated wildlife species, including sage grouse.

Dated: August 12, 2004.

**K Lynn Bennett,**

*Bureau of Land Management, Idaho State Director.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Minerals Management Service

#### Gulf of Mexico, Outer Continental Shelf, Central Planning Area, Oil and Gas Lease Sale 194 (2005) Environmental Assessment

**AGENCY:** Minerals Management Service.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability of an environmental assessment.

**SUMMARY:** The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for proposed Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Central Planning Area (CPA) Lease Sale 194. In this EA, MMS reexamined the potential environmental effects of the proposed action and its alternatives based on any new information regarding potential impacts and issues that were not available at the time the Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2003-2007; Central Planning Area Sales 185, 190, 194, 198, and 201; Western Planning Area Sales 187, 192, 196, and 200; Final Environmental Impact Statement; Volumes I and II (Multisale EIS) was completed in November 2002.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394, Mr. Dennis Chew, telephone (504) 736-2793.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The Multisale EIS analyzed the effects of a typical lease sale by presenting a set of ranges for resource estimates, project exploration and development activities, and impact-producing factors for any of the proposed CPA lease sales. The level of activities projected for proposed Lease Sale 194 falls within these ranges. No new significant impacts were identified for proposed Lease Sale 194.