

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service****50 CFR Part 17**

RIN 1018-AU44

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for the *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* (Suisun thistle) and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* (soft bird's-beak)**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.**ACTION:** Proposed rule; reopening of comment period, notice of availability of draft economic analysis, and amended Required Determinations.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the reopening of the comment period on the proposed designation of critical habitat for two tidal marsh plants: *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* (Suisun thistle) and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* (soft bird's-beak). We also announce the availability of the draft economic analysis for the proposed critical habitat designation and an amended Required Determinations section of the proposal. The draft economic analysis identifies potential costs will be \$1.6 million in undiscounted dollars over a 20-year period as a result of the proposed designation of critical habitat, including those costs coextensive with listing and recovery. Discounted future costs are estimated to be \$1.4 million over 20 years (\$95,002 annually) at a 3 percent discount rate, or \$1.2 million over 20 years (\$116,722 annually) at a 7 percent discount rate. The amended Required Determinations section provides our determination concerning compliance with applicable statutes and Executive Orders that we have deferred until the information from the draft economic analysis of this proposal was available. We are reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule, the associated draft economic analysis, and the amended Required Determinations section.

DATES: We will accept public comments until December 20, 2006.**ADDRESSES:** Written comments and materials may be submitted to us by any one of the following methods:

(1) *E-mail:* You may send comments by electronic mail (e-mail) to: suisunplantsCH@fws.gov. For directions on how to file comments electronically, see the "Public Comments Solicited" section.

(2) *Mail or hand delivery:* You may submit written comments and information to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2605, Sacramento, CA 95825.

(3) *Facsimile:* You may fax your comments to 916-414-6712.

(4) *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Arnold Roessler, Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, at the address listed in **ADDRESSES** (telephone 916-414-6600; facsimile 916-414-6712). Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Public Comments Solicited**

We will accept written comments and information during this reopened comment period. We solicit comments on the original proposed critical habitat designation for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* published in the **Federal Register** on April 11, 2006 (71 FR 18456) and on our draft economic analysis of the proposed designation. We will consider information and recommendations from all interested parties. We are particularly interested in comments concerning:

(1) The reasons why any habitat should or should not be determined to be critical habitat, as provided by section 4 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act) (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), including whether the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of including such area as part of critical habitat;

(2) Specific information on the amount and distribution of *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* or *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis*, and what habitat is essential to the conservation of these plants and why;

(3) Land use designations and current or planned activities in the subject areas and their possible impacts on proposed habitat;

(4) Information on the extent to which any State and local environmental protection measures referred to in the draft economic analysis may have been adopted largely as a result of the listing of *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* or *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis*;

(5) Information on whether the draft economic analysis identifies all State and local costs attributable to the proposed critical habitat designation, and information on any costs that have been inadvertently overlooked;

(6) Information on whether the draft economic analysis makes appropriate assumptions regarding current practices and likely regulatory changes imposed as a result of the designation of critical habitat;

(7) Information on whether the draft economic analysis correctly assesses the effect on regional costs associated with any land use controls that may derive from the designation of critical habitat;

(8) Information on areas that could potentially be disproportionately impacted by designation of critical habitat for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* or *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis*;

(9) Any foreseeable economic or other impacts resulting from the proposed designation of critical habitat, and in particular, any impacts on small entities or families; the reasons why our conclusion that the proposed designation of critical habitat will not result in a disproportionate effect to small businesses should or should not warrant further consideration; and other information that would indicate that the designation of critical habitat would or would not have any impacts on small entities or families;

(10) Information on whether the draft economic analysis appropriately identifies all costs that could result from the designation; and

(11) Information on whether our approach to critical habitat designation could be improved or modified in any way to provide for greater public participation and understanding, or to assist us in accommodating public concern and comments.

Pursuant to section 4(b)(2) of the Act, an area may be excluded from critical habitat if it is determined that the benefits of such exclusion outweigh the benefits of including a particular area as critical habitat, unless the failure to designate such area as critical habitat will result in the extinction of the species. We may exclude an area from designated critical habitat based on economic impacts, national security, or any other relevant impact.

All previous comments and information submitted during the initial comment period on the April 11, 2006, proposed rule (71 FR 18456) need not be resubmitted. If you wish to comment, you may submit your comments and materials concerning the draft economic analysis and the proposed rule by any one of several methods (see **ADDRESSES**). Our final designation of critical habitat will take into consideration all comments and any additional information we received during both comment periods. On the basis of public comment on this analysis, the critical habitat proposal, and the final economic

analysis, we may, during the development of our final determination, find that areas proposed are not essential, are appropriate for exclusion under section 4(b)(2) of the Act, or are not appropriate for exclusion.

If submitting comments electronically, please also include "Attn: RIN 1018-AU44" and your name and return address in your e-mail message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we have received your e-mail message, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

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 names and home addresses, etc., but if you wish us to consider withholding this information, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. In addition, you must present rationale for withholding this information. This rationale must demonstrate that disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy. Unsupported assertions will not meet this burden. In the absence of exceptional, documentable circumstances, this information will be released. We will always make submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

You may obtain copies of the proposed rule and draft economic analysis by mail from the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office at the address listed under **ADDRESSES** or by visiting our Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/sacramento/>.

Background

We published a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* on April 11, 2006 (71 FR 18456). Because the proposed critical habitat partially overlaps between the two species, the proposed critical habitat totaled approximately 2,726 acres (ac) (1,103 hectares (ha)) in Solano, Contra Costa, and Napa counties, California. In a June 14, 2004, settlement agreement, we agreed to submit for publication in the **Federal Register** a final critical habitat designation for these plants on or before April 1, 2007.

Critical habitat is defined in section 3 of the Act as the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by a

species, at the time it is listed in accordance with the Act, on which are found those physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protection, and specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by a species at the time it is listed, upon a determination that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species. If the proposed rule is made final, section 7 of the Act will prohibit destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat by any activity funded, authorized, or carried out by any Federal agency. Federal agencies proposing actions affecting areas designated as critical habitat must consult with us on the effects of their proposed actions, pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Act.

Draft Economic Analysis

Section 4(b)(2) of the Act requires that we designate or revise critical habitat based upon the best scientific and commercial data available, after taking into consideration the economic impact, impact on national security, or any other relevant impact of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. Based on the April 11, 2006, proposed rule to designate critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* (71 FR 18456), we have prepared a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation.

The current draft economic analysis estimates the foreseeable potential economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation and other conservation-related actions for these species on government agencies and private businesses and individuals. The economic analysis identifies potential costs will be \$1.6 million in undiscounted dollars over a 20-year period as a result of the proposed designation of critical habitat, including those costs coextensive with listing and recovery. Discounted future costs are estimated to be \$1.4 million over 20 years (\$95,002 annually) at a 3 percent discount rate, or \$1.2 million over 20 years (\$116,722 annually) at a 7 percent discount rate.

The draft economic analysis considers the potential economic effects of actions relating to the conservation of *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis*, including costs associated with sections 4, 7, and 10 of the Act, and including those attributable to designating critical habitat. It further considers the economic effects of protective measures taken as a result of other Federal, State,

and local laws that aid habitat conservation for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* in essential habitat areas. The draft analysis considers both economic efficiency and distributional effects. In the case of habitat conservation, efficiency effects generally reflect the "opportunity costs" associated with the commitment of resources to comply with habitat protection measures (such as lost economic opportunities associated with restrictions on land use).

This analysis also addresses how potential economic impacts are likely to be distributed, including an assessment of any local or regional impacts of habitat conservation and the potential effects of conservation activities on small entities and the energy industry. This information can be used by decision-makers to assess whether the effects of the designation might unduly burden a particular group or economic sector. Finally, this draft analysis looks retrospectively at costs that have been incurred since the date these species were listed as endangered (November 20, 1997; 62 FR 61916) and considers those costs that may occur in the 20 years following a designation of critical habitat.

As stated earlier, we solicit data and comments from the public on this draft economic analysis, as well as on all aspects of the proposal. We may revise the proposal or its supporting documents to incorporate or address new information received during the comment period. In particular, we may exclude an area from critical habitat if we determine that the benefits of excluding the area outweigh the benefits of including the area as critical habitat, provided such exclusion will not result in the extinction of the species.

Required Determinations—Amended

In our April 11, 2006 proposed rule (71 FR 18456), we indicated that we would be deferring our determination of compliance with several statutes and Executive Orders until the information concerning potential economic impacts of the designation and potential effects on landowners and stakeholders was available in the draft economic analysis. Those data are now available for our use in making these determinations. In this notice we are affirming the information contained in the proposed rule concerning Executive Order 13132 and Executive Order 12988; the Paperwork Reduction Act; and the President's memorandum of April 29, 1994, "Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments (59 FR 22951). Based on

the information made available to us in the draft economic analysis, we are amending our Required Determinations, as provided below, concerning Executive Order 12866 and the Regulatory Flexibility Act, Executive Order 13211, Executive Order 12630, and the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Regulatory Planning and Review

In accordance with Executive Order 12866, this document is a significant rule because it may raise novel legal and policy issues. Based on our draft economic analysis of the proposed designation of critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis*, costs related to conservation activities for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* pursuant to sections 4, 7, and 10 of the Act are estimated to be approximately \$1.6 million (undiscounted) over 20 years. Discounted future costs are estimated to be \$1.4 million over 20 years (\$95,002 annually) at a 3 percent discount rate, or \$1.2 million over 20 years (\$116,722 annually) at a 7 percent discount rate. Therefore, based on our draft economic analysis, it is not anticipated that the proposed designation of critical habitat for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* would result in an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more or affect the economy in a material way. Due to the timeline for publication in the **Federal Register**, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has not formally reviewed the proposed rule or accompanying economic analysis.

Further, Executive Order 12866 directs Federal Agencies promulgating regulations to evaluate regulatory alternatives (Office of Management and Budget, Circular A-4, September 17, 2003). Pursuant to Circular A-4, once it has been determined that the Federal regulatory action is appropriate, the agency will then need to consider alternative regulatory approaches. Since the determination of critical habitat is a statutory requirement pursuant to the Act, we must then evaluate alternative regulatory approaches, where feasible, when promulgating a designation of critical habitat.

In developing our designations of critical habitat, we consider economic impacts, impacts to national security, and other relevant impacts pursuant to section 4(b)(2) of the Act. Based on the discretion allowable under this provision, we may exclude any particular area from the designation of critical habitat providing that the benefits of such exclusion outweigh the

benefits of specifying the area as critical habitat and that such exclusion would not result in the extinction of the species. As such, we believe that the evaluation of the inclusion or exclusion of particular areas, or combination thereof, in a designation constitutes our regulatory alternative analysis.

Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*)

Under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*), as amended by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act (5 U.S.C. 802(2)) (SBREFA), whenever an agency is required to publish a notice of rulemaking for any proposed or final rule, it must prepare and make available for public comment a regulatory flexibility analysis that describes the effect of the rule on small entities (i.e., small businesses, small organizations, and small government jurisdictions). However, no regulatory flexibility analysis is required if the head of an agency certifies the rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Based upon our draft economic analysis of the proposed designation, we provide our analysis for determining whether the proposed rule would result in a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. Based on comments received, this determination is subject to revision as part of the final rulemaking.

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), small entities include small organizations, such as independent nonprofit organizations; small governmental jurisdictions, including school boards and city and town governments that serve fewer than 50,000 residents; and small businesses (13 CFR 121.201). Small businesses include manufacturing and mining concerns with fewer than 500 employees, wholesale trade entities with fewer than 100 employees, retail and service businesses with less than \$5 million in annual sales, general and heavy construction businesses with less than \$27.5 million in annual business, special trade contractors doing less than \$11.5 million in annual business, and agricultural businesses with annual sales less than \$750,000. To determine if potential economic impacts to these small entities are significant, we considered the types of activities that might trigger regulatory impacts under this designation as well as types of project modifications that may result. In general, the term "significant economic impact" is meant to apply to a typical small business firm's business operations.

To determine if the proposed designation of critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* would affect a substantial number of small entities, we considered the number of small entities affected within particular types of economic activities (such as residential and commercial development). We considered each industry or category individually to determine if certification is appropriate. In estimating the numbers of small entities potentially affected, we also considered whether their activities have any Federal involvement; some kinds of activities are unlikely to have any Federal involvement and so will not be affected by the designation of critical habitat. Designation of critical habitat only affects activities conducted, funded, permitted, or authorized by Federal agencies; non-Federal activities are not affected by the designation.

If this proposed critical habitat designation is made final, Federal agencies must consult with us under section 7 of the Act if their activities may affect designated critical habitat. Consultations to avoid the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat would be incorporated into the existing consultation process.

In our draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation, we evaluated the potential economic effects on small business entities resulting from conservation actions related to the listing of *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* and proposed designation of its critical habitat. The small business entities that may be affected include a private nonprofit land conservation organization and a private ranch. The draft economic assessment does not project significant impacts to either entity because one business has unknown revenue with effects of the proposed habitat designation likely being negligible. The other business would potentially face annualized costs worth only 0.32 percent of annual revenues. As such, we do not anticipate that this proposed regulation will result in a significant impact to a substantial number of small business entities.

Please refer to our draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation for a more detailed discussion of potential economic impacts.

Executive Order 13211—Energy Supply, Distribution, and Use

On May 18, 2001, the President issued Executive Order 13211 on regulations that significantly affect energy supply,

distribution, and use. Executive Order 13211 requires agencies to prepare Statements of Energy Effects when undertaking certain actions. This proposed designation of critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* is considered a significant regulatory action under Executive Order 12866 due to it potentially raising novel legal and policy issues. OMB has provided guidance for implementing this Executive Order that outlines nine outcomes that may constitute “a significant adverse effect” when compared without the regulatory action under consideration. The draft economic analysis finds that none of these criteria are relevant to this analysis. Thus, based on the information in the draft economic analysis, energy-related impacts associated with *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* conservation activities within proposed critical habitat are not expected. As such, the proposed designation of critical habitat is not expected to significantly affect energy supplies, distribution, or use and a Statement of Energy Effects is not required.

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (2 U.S.C. 1501 et seq.)

In accordance with the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (2 U.S.C. 1501), the Service makes the following findings:

(a) This rule will not produce a Federal mandate. In general, a Federal mandate is a provision in legislation, statute, or regulation that would impose an enforceable duty upon State, local, or Tribal governments, or the private sector, and includes both “Federal intergovernmental mandates” and “Federal private sector mandates.” These terms are defined in 2 U.S.C. 658(5)–(7). “Federal intergovernmental mandate” includes a regulation that “would impose an enforceable duty upon State, local, or tribal governments,” with two exceptions. It excludes “a condition of federal assistance.” It also excludes “a duty arising from participation in a voluntary Federal program,” unless the regulation “relates to a then-existing Federal program under which \$500,000,000 or

more is provided annually to State, local, and Tribal governments under entitlement authority,” if the provision would “increase the stringency of conditions of assistance” or “place caps upon, or otherwise decrease, the Federal Government’s responsibility to provide funding” and the State, local, or tribal governments “lack authority” to adjust accordingly. (At the time of enactment, these entitlement programs were: Medicaid; Aid to Families with Dependent Children work programs; Child Nutrition; Food Stamps; Social Services Block Grants; Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants; Foster Care, Adoption Assistance, and Independent Living; Family Support Welfare Services; and Child Support Enforcement.) “Federal private sector mandate” includes a regulation that “would impose an enforceable duty upon the private sector, except (i) a condition of Federal assistance; or (ii) a duty arising from participation in a voluntary Federal program.”

The designation of critical habitat does not impose a legally binding duty on non-Federal government entities or private parties. Under the Act, the only regulatory effect is that Federal agencies must ensure that their actions do not destroy or adversely modify critical habitat under section 7. Non-Federal entities that receive Federal funding, assistance, permits, or otherwise require approval or authorization from a Federal agency for an action may be indirectly impacted by the designation of critical habitat. However, the legally binding duty to avoid destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat rests squarely on the Federal agency. Furthermore, to the extent that non-Federal entities are indirectly impacted because they receive Federal assistance or participate in a voluntary Federal aid program, the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act would not apply, nor would critical habitat shift the costs of the large entitlement programs listed above on to State governments.

(b) As discussed in the draft economic analysis of the proposed designation of critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis*, the impacts on nonprofits and small governments are expected to be small. There is no record

of consultations between the Service and any of these governments since *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* were listed as endangered on November 20, 1997 (62 FR 61916). It is likely that small governments involved with developments and infrastructure projects will be interested parties or involved with projects involving section 7 consultations for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* within their jurisdictional areas. Any costs associated with this activity are likely to represent a small portion of a local government’s budget. Consequently, we do not believe that the designation of critical habitat for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* will significantly or uniquely affect these small governmental entities. As such, a Small Government Agency Plan is not required.

Executive Order 12630—Takings

In accordance with Executive Order 12630 (“Government Actions and Interference with Constitutionally Protected Private Property Rights”), we have analyzed the potential takings implications of proposing critical habitat for *Cirsium hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *Cordylanthus mollis* ssp. *mollis* in a takings implications assessment. The takings implications assessment concludes that this proposed designation of critical habitat for *C. hydrophilum* var. *hydrophilum* and *C. mollis* ssp. *mollis* does not pose significant takings implications.

Author

The primary authors of this notice are the staff of the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office.

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

Dated: November 13, 2006.

Todd Willens,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

[FR Doc. E6–19572 Filed 11–17–06; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–55–P