

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Authority

We provide this notice under section 10 of the Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*)

Dated: April 17, 2013.

Michael G. Thabault,

Assistant Regional Director, Mountain-Prairie Region.

[FR Doc. 2013-09495 Filed 4-22-13; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R6-ES-2013-N017;
FXES1113060000-134-FF06E00000]

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Black-Footed Ferret Draft Recovery Plan

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability for review and comment.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability of a draft recovery plan for the black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*). This species is federally listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). The Service solicits review and comment from the public on this draft revised plan.

DATES: Comments on the draft revised recovery plan must be received on or before June 24, 2013.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the draft revised recovery plan are available by request from the National Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 190, Wellington, CO 80549; telephone: 970-897-2730. Submit comments on the draft recovery plan to the Recovery Coordinator at this same address. An electronic copy of the draft recovery plan is available at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/species/recovery-plans.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Recovery Coordinator, at the above address, or telephone 970-897-2730.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Restoring an endangered or threatened animal or plant to the point where it is again a secure, self-sustaining member of its ecosystem is a primary goal of the Service's endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, the Service prepares recovery plans for the federally listed species native to the United States where a plan will promote the conservation of the species. Recovery plans describe site-specific actions necessary for the conservation of the species; establish objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the species no longer needs the protection of the Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*); and provide estimates of the time and cost for implementing the needed recovery measures.

The Act requires recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. The original plan for the species was approved in 1978. The recovery plan was revised in 1988.

Section 4(f) of the Act requires that public notice and opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. The Service will consider all information received during a public comment period when preparing each new or revised recovery plan for approval. The Service and other Federal agencies also will take these comments into consideration in the course of implementing approved recovery plans. It is our policy to request peer review of recovery plans. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the public and peer reviewers in an appendix to the approved recovery plan.

The black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) was historically found throughout the Great Plains, mountain basins, and semi-arid grasslands of North America wherever prairie dogs occurred. The species was listed as endangered in 1967 (32 FR 4001; March 11, 1967) under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966 and again in 1970 under the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969 (35 FR 8491; June 2, 1970). On January 4, 1974, the black-footed ferret was listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (39 FR 1171). The ferret's close association with prairie dogs was an important factor in the ferret's decline. From the late 1800s to approximately the 1960s, prairie dog-occupied habitat and prairie dog numbers were dramatically reduced by the effects of both temporal and permanent habitat loss caused by

conversion of native grasslands to cropland, and poisoning and disease. The ferret population declined precipitously as a result.

The recovery of the black-footed ferret will be achieved by establishing a number of ferret populations where appropriate habitat exists and by ameliorating threats impacting the species so as to allow the ferret's persistence. Although ferret habitat has been dramatically reduced from historical times, a sufficient amount remains, if its quality and configuration is appropriately managed. This management, for the most part, is likely to be conducted by State, Tribal, and Federal fish and wildlife and land management agencies. Additionally, private parties, including landowners and conservation organizations, are key for ferret recovery. Many partners contributing to ferret recovery in many places will help minimize the risk of loss of wild populations.

Specifically, recovery of black-footed ferrets will depend upon: (1) Continued efforts of captive breeding facilities to provide suitable animals for release into the wild; (2) conservation of prairie dog habitat adequate to sustain ferrets in several populations distributed throughout their historical range; and (3) management of sylvatic plague. The single, most feasible action that would benefit black-footed ferret recovery is to improve prairie dog conservation. If efforts are undertaken to more proactively manage existing prairie dog habitat for ferret recovery, all other threats to the species will be substantially less difficult to address. Downlisting of the black-footed ferret could be accomplished in approximately 10 years if conservation actions continue at existing reintroduction sites and if additional reintroduction sites are established. Delisting will be possible if more intensive reintroduction efforts are conducted of the black-footed ferret.

Request for Public Comments

The Service solicits public comments on the draft revised recovery plan. All comments received by the date specified in **DATES** will be considered prior to approval of the plan. Written comments and materials regarding the plan should be addressed to the Recovery Coordinator (see **ADDRESSES** section). Comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation we used in preparing this draft revised recovery plan will be available, by appointment, for public inspection during normal business hours at the above address. If you submit a comment that includes personal identifying

information, you may request at the top of your document that we withhold this information from public review. However, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Authority

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

Dated: April 3, 2013.

Matt Hogan,

Acting Regional Director, Denver, Colorado.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R5-R-2012-N282; BAC-4311-K9-S3]

Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area, Penobscot, Kennebec, and Waldo Counties, ME; Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (we, the Service), announce the availability of a draft comprehensive conservation plan and environmental assessment (CCP and EA) for Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Carlton Pond Waterfowl Production Area (WPA), located in Penobscot, Kennebec, and Waldo Counties, Maine, for public review and comment. The draft CCP and EA describes our proposal for managing the refuge and WPA for the next 15 years.

Also available for public review and comment are the draft findings of appropriateness and draft compatibility determinations for uses to be allowed upon initial completion of the plan, if alternative B is selected. These are included as appendix B in the draft CCP and EA.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please send your comments no later than May 31, 2013. We will announce upcoming public meetings in local news media, via our project mailing list, and on our regional planning Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/Sunkhaze%20Meadows/ccphome.html>.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments or requests for copies or more information by any of the following

methods. You may request hard copies or a CD-ROM of the documents.

Email: northeastplanning@fws.gov. Please include "Sunkhaze Meadows NWR and Carlton Pond WPA Draft CCP" in the subject line of the message.

Fax: Attention: Lia McLaughlin, 413-253-8468.

U.S. Mail: Lia McLaughlin, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, MA 01035.

In-Person Drop-off, Viewing, or Pickup: Call 207-594-0600 to make an appointment (necessary for view/pickup only) during regular business hours at Maine Coastal Islands NWR, 9 Water Street, Rockland, ME 04841. For more information on locations for viewing or obtaining documents, see "Public Availability of Documents" under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Beth Goettel, Refuge Manager, 207-594-0600 (phone), or Lia McLaughlin, Planning Team Leader, 413-253-8575 (phone); northeastplanning@fws.gov (email).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

With this notice, we continue the CCP process for Sunkhaze Meadows NWR and Carlton Pond WPA. We started this process through a notice in the **Federal Register** (76 FR 14984; March 18, 2011).

Currently, Sunkhaze Meadows NWR is comprised of three units: the Sunkhaze Meadows Unit, the Benton Unit, and the Sandy Stream Unit. The Sunkhaze Meadows Unit is the largest of the three, at 11,484 acres, located in the town of Milford in Penobscot County. The Benton Unit is a 334-acre former dairy farm in the town of Benton in Kennebec County. The Sandy Stream Unit is a 58-acre parcel in the town of Unity in Waldo County. Sunkhaze Meadows NWR was established in 1988 to preserve the Sunkhaze Meadows peat bog (now the Sunkhaze Meadows Unit) and to ensure public access to this unique environment. Sunkhaze Meadows NWR includes more than 3,450 acres of freshwater wetland-peatland that provides breeding and migrating habitat for waterfowl and other wetland species.

Carlton Pond WPA is a 1,068-acre artificial impoundment located in the town of Troy in Waldo County. The area was acquired by the Service in 1966 to protect the waterfowl and other wildlife associated with this area in central Maine. Carlton Pond WPA has historically provided good nesting habitat for waterfowl and other birds, and is one of the few areas in Maine that provides nesting habitat for the black

tern, which is listed as endangered by the State. Many bird species that use Carlton Pond WPA have been listed by the Partners In Flight organization as species that are declining.

Sunkhaze NWR and Carlton Pond WPA are currently administered by staff from Maine Coastal Islands NWR. Both areas offer an abundance of wildlife observation and photography opportunities. Partners offer limited environmental education and interpretation programs. Visitors to the refuge and WPA also participate in outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, snowmobiling, hunting, and fishing.

Background

The CCP Process

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee) (Refuge Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, requires us to develop a CCP for each national wildlife refuge. The purpose for developing a CCP is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year plan for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife management, conservation, legal mandates, and our policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. We will review and update the CCP at least every 15 years in accordance with the Refuge Administration Act.

Public Outreach

We started pre-planning for the Sunkhaze Meadows NWR and Carlton Pond WPA CCP on January 4, 2011. In March 2011, we published a notice of intent in the **Federal Register**, a press release, and a newsletter, all announcing our intent to prepare a CCP for the refuge and WPA. In March and April 2011, we had a formal public scoping period. The purpose of the public scoping period was to solicit comments from the community and other interested parties on the issues and impacts that should be evaluated in the draft CCP and EA. To help solicit public comments, we held two public meetings at the Milford Town Hall and one public meeting at Unity College during the formal public scoping period.