



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

SNAKE RIVER BASIN OFFICE

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PRIVATE LANDOWNER AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE COOPERATE TO BENEFIT CONSERVATION OF NORTHERN IDAHO GROUND SQUIRRELS IN ADAMS COUNTY, IDAHO

Adams County residents Bob and Peggy Mack and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) signed an agreement to benefit the northern Idaho ground squirrel, a rare ground squirrel species located only in Adams and Valley Counties, Idaho. The ground squirrel was listed as threatened in May, 2000 under the Endangered Species Act.

The agreement, known as a Safe Harbor Agreement, includes a permit which authorizes some impacts to the listed ground squirrel. Under a Safe Harbor Agreement, participating private landowners voluntarily undertake management activities to enhance, restore or maintain habitat benefitting species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Safe Harbor Agreements encourage private and other non-Federal property owners to implement conservation efforts for listed species by assuring property owners they will not be subjected to increased property use restrictions if their efforts attract or increase numbers of the listed species on their property.

With the northern Idaho ground squirrel Safe Harbor Agreement, a variety of conservation measures can be implemented by the Service on the Macks' property near New Meadows, Idaho. Northern Idaho ground squirrels currently occupy about 5 acres of the private land. By enhancing northern Idaho ground squirrel habitat within this 5-acre area, it is hoped that the squirrel population will expand at this site, thus providing a stable population with surplus individuals for transplanting to other sites in need of supplementation. Threats to the ground squirrel include habitat loss due to forest structure and meadow invasion by conifers; fire suppression; competition from the larger Columbian ground squirrel; land use changes; and recreational shooting. Under the Agreement, the Macks will receive funding under the Service's Endangered Species Act *Private Landowner Incentive Program*.

"We are extremely pleased to have entered into this Agreement with the Macks. This is a fine example of the Service and private landowners working cooperatively, with the mutual goal of conserving listed species while minimizing disruption of the landowner's land use activities. The Mack Safe Harbor Agreement is the first agreement in the Service's Pacific Region, and we hope to pursue further such efforts in the future," said Bob Ruesink, Snake River Basin Office Supervisor.

For more information about this or other Safe Harbor Agreements, please contact *Dennis Mackey* at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, (208) 378-5267. This news release, a copy of the Agreement and information about Conservation Planning is available on the Snake River Basin Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/r1srbo>.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 525 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.