



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office
1387 South Vinnell Way, Room 368
Boise, Idaho 83709

May 7, 2004

Dear Interested Party:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today published a Notice of Availability (NOA) for a proposed Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, as well as an accompanying draft Environmental Assessment (EA) in the *Federal Register*. Public comments on both documents will be accepted until June 7, 2004.

The southern Idaho ground squirrel (*Spermophilus brunneus endemicus*) was identified as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2001. It is found in the Weiser River Basin in southwest Idaho.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) has applied to the Service for an enhancement of survival permit through Section 10 of the ESA. The permit application includes the proposed Programmatic Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel Candidate Conservation Agreement between the Service, the Department, and the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation.

Under the proposed Candidate Conservation Agreement, the parties would implement conservation measures for the southern Idaho ground squirrel over approximately 1,046,569 acres in Adams, Gem, Payette and Washington Counties. The primary goal of the Agreement is to implement habitat and population conservation measures for the squirrel on non-Federal lands enrolled under the Agreement. Habitat conservation measures should focus on restoration or protection of native plant communities, as well as other habitat management measures to benefit the squirrel. If appropriate, the Service may authorize reintroducing or moving ground squirrels to suitable, unoccupied habitat.

Individual landowners interested in conserving the species who have suitable habitat on their property and are willing to participate in certain conservation measures may enroll in the Agreement. The proposed term of the Agreement is 20 years.

To comply with NEPA, the Service has prepared a draft Environmental Assessment in conjunction with the Agreement. The purpose of the EA is to evaluate the proposal, present several alternatives for implementation of the proposal, and facilitate public comment. Proposed alternatives for implementation of the Agreement and analysis of each appear in the draft document. The EA is published under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances Final Policy" (64 FR 32726).

Comments on both the proposed Programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances and the draft Environmental Assessment may be submitted in writing to: Carmen Thomas, Project Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709. Comments may also be faxed to 208-378-5262, or e-mailed to fw1srbocomment@fws.gov. Please include "SIGS CCAA Comments" in the title line for faxes and e-mails. Please submit electronic comments in an ASCII file format, and avoid the use of special characters and encryption. If our Internet connection is disrupted, please submit your comments by mail or fax, and obtain hard copies of the documents from the contact office above.

Copies of the documents are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709. The documents may also be viewed online at <http://idahoes.fws.gov>. If you have any questions, please contact Carmen Thomas at 208-378-5243.

Sincerely,

Jeffery L. Foss
Field Supervisor