

goals and objectives for the refuges. The planning process for refuges is designed to prioritize conservation of important wildlife habitats, while providing for wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities that are compatible with the establishing purposes of each refuge and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

We will conduct a comprehensive conservation planning process that will provide opportunities for Tribal, State, and local government agencies; organizations; and the public to participate in identifying planning issues through public involvement activities. We request input in the form of issues, concerns, ideas, and suggestions for future management of Selawik Refuge.

We will prepare an EA in accordance with the requirements of the NEPA, as amended; NEPA regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508); other appropriate Federal laws and regulations; and Service policies that comply with those laws and regulations.

#### Refuge Overview

Selawik Refuge straddles the Arctic Circle in northwestern Alaska, encompassing an area approximately the size of Connecticut. The Refuge was established by ANILCA in 1980. When land conveyances under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (approximately 800,000 acres) are completed, 2.1 million acres are expected to remain under federal ownership and management. The Refuge staff manages Selawik Refuge from a headquarters office in Kotzebue, Alaska.

ANILCA requires us to designate areas in refuges according to their respective resources and values and to specify programs and uses within the areas designated. To meet this requirement, the Alaska Region established categories for refuges including Wilderness, Minimal, Moderate, Intensive, and Wild River management. For each management category, we identified appropriate activities, public uses, commercial uses, and facilities. Only the Minimal, Wilderness, and Wild River management categories are applied to Selawik Refuge. The Selawik River and corridor is a designated Wild River. About 11 percent of the Refuge is designated Wilderness. The remainder, and majority of the Refuge's acreage, is managed in the Minimal category.

The Selawik River meanders through the heart of the Refuge, creating a rich succession of habitats, including vast wetlands. The names of both the river and the Refuge originated from the Inupiaq word "siilivik," which means

"place of sheefish." The sheefish, or inconnu, is a member of the whitefish family that provides an important, and highly desired, food resource for Native subsistence harvesters in this arctic region of Alaska.

Extensive tundra wetlands containing grass and sedge meadows dominate the Refuge landscape, while boreal spruce forests, alder, and willow thickets trace stream and river drainages. Multitudes of migratory waterfowl and shorebirds breed on 24,000 lakes and ponds within the Refuge. Neo-tropical songbirds nest in forests and willow thickets. Moose, wolves, lynx, bears, muskoxen, arctic and red fox, beavers, and muskrats are year-round residents. The Western Arctic caribou herd migrates across Selawik Refuge. In mild winters, small bands of caribou remain on the Refuge to forage in the lichen-covered foothills. Many rivers, sloughs, and lakes support both freshwater and anadromous fisheries, and provide spawning grounds for northern pike, arctic grayling, and various types of whitefish.

Access to the Refuge is possible only by boat, float-or ski-equipped airplane, snowmobile, or dog sled team. Snowmobile trails provide vital links among the Native villages of the region in winter and are usually passable to travelers through the end of April. Several Native Alaskan villages are located within or near the Refuge boundaries including Noorvik, Selawik, Kiana, and Ambler.

The purposes of the Selawik Refuge set forth by ANILCA in 1980 are (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd (including participation in scientific studies to better manage caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and sheefish; (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats; (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and (iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge.

*Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities:* We have identified preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities that may be addressed in the CCP. These are (1) management of legal access such as easements and rights-of-way; (2) management of access for community residents and the visiting public; (3) management of

hunting and fishing, both subsistence and commercial; (4) concerns about degradation of cultural resources; (5) impacts of off-refuge activities to Refuge resources; and (6) concerns about how managers can proactively address uncertainties such as climate change and related large-scale habitat changes. These and other issues will be explored during the public scoping process. The Refuge planning team, including representatives from State of Alaska and Tribal governments, will determine which key issues will be addressed in the revised CCP.

*Public Meetings:* We will involve the public in the planning process through open houses, meetings, and multiple requests for comments. We will mail planning updates to individuals, agencies, and organizations on the Selawik Refuge mailing list to keep the public aware of the status of the revised CCP. We will inform the public as to how we use their comments and other input in each stage of the planning process. Scoping meetings are planned to be held in October and November 2008 in Kotzebue and in several local communities within or near the Refuge boundaries. Details of public involvement and participation activities will be announced locally.

#### Public Availability of Comments

Before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information with 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 may 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.

Dated: September 25, 2008.

#### Gary Edwards,

*Regional Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

[9000; CA–690–08–1020–EE]

#### Notice of Intent To Amend the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, California

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

**ACTION:** Notice of Intent.

**SUMMARY:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Needles Field Office intends to prepare an amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan with an associated environmental assessment (EA). This notice initiates the public participation and scoping processes for the CDCA Plan amendment and environmental assessment.

**DATES:** Public comments will be accepted throughout the plan amendment and EA process, but to be most beneficial comments on issues and potential impacts should be submitted in writing to the address listed below within 30 days following the publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments and other correspondence regarding issues and planning criteria should be sent to the BLM, Needles Field Office, attention George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Needles Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 1303 South US Highway 95, Needles, California 92363. Documents pertinent to this notice, including comments of respondents, will be available for public review at the Needles Field Office, California during regular business hours (7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.) Monday through Friday, except holidays.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For further information or to have your name added to the project mailing list, contact George R. Meckfessel, (760) 326-7008, or e-mail [George\\_Meckfessel@ca.blm.gov](mailto:George_Meckfessel@ca.blm.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This document provides notice that the BLM, Needles Field Office intends to prepare an amendment to the CDCA Plan with an associated environmental assessment that would make all or a portion of the Valley Wells Allotment unavailable for grazing. The allotment consists of 223,000 acres and is located in northeastern San Bernardino County, California. The allotment includes portions of the North Mesquite Mountains Wilderness, Mesquite Wilderness, Kingston Range Wilderness, and the Hollow Hills Wilderness areas.

The proposal to make a portion or all of the allotment unavailable for grazing livestock does not conform to the CDCA Plan and, therefore, requires the development of a plan amendment.

Approximately half of the allotment is within a Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA), designated by the BLM through the Northern and Eastern Mojave Plan amendment (2002) to the CDCA Plan. Most, but not all, of the

DWMA contains critical habitat for the threatened desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Making all or a portion of the allotment unavailable for grazing would complement and enhance implementation of the USFWS Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan (1994). Comparable desert tortoise habitat within the allotment is contained in, and outside, the DWMA.

Additional benefits to non-listed species and habitats, such as the BLM sensitive Rusby's desert mallow (*Sphaeralcea rusbyi* ssp. *eremicola*) and the Mojave fringe-toed lizard (*Uma scoparia*), would also be realized by removal of cattle grazing from all or portions of the allotment.

*Preliminary issues identified include:* air quality; areas of critical environmental concern; cultural resources; environmental justice; livestock grazing; Native American religious concerns; socioeconomic; soils, water quality; wetlands/riparian zones; wilderness; wildlife, including threatened or endangered species; and vegetation, including invasive species.

*Preliminary planning criteria include:* 1. Developing the plan amendment in compliance with Federal Land Policy and Management Act, all other applicable laws, regulations, executive orders, and BLM supplemental program guidance; 2. developing an EA in the planning process that will comply with National Environmental Policy Act standards; 3. initiating government to government consultation, including tribal interests; 4. incorporating by reference the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management into the plan amendment/EA; 5. complying with Appendix C of BLM's Planning Handbook (H 1601-1) in making resource specific determinations; 6. assuring that the plan amendment is compatible, to the extent possible, with existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies; and, 7. consider the extent to which the plan amendment achieves the recovery goals outlined in the Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan and the Northern and Eastern Mojave Plan amendment to the CDCA Plan.

You may submit comments on issues and planning criteria in writing to the BLM using one of the methods listed in the "ADDRESSES" section above. To be most helpful, you should submit comments within 30 days after the date of publication of this notice. 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.

The BLM will place issues identified during scoping into one of three categories:

1. Issues to be resolved in the plan amendment;
2. Issues to be resolved through policy or administrative action; or
3. Issues beyond the scope of this plan amendment.

The BLM will provide an explanation in the plan as to why an issue was placed in category two or three. The public is also encouraged to help identify any management questions and concerns that should be addressed in the plan amendment. The BLM will work collaboratively with interested parties to identify the management decisions that are best suited to local, regional, and national needs and concerns.

The BLM will use an interdisciplinary approach to develop the plan amendment in order to consider the variety of resource issues and concerns identified. Specialists with expertise in the following disciplines that will be involved in the planning process include but are not limited to rangeland management, wilderness, sensitive species (plants and animals,) cultural resources, and recreation.

Dated: September 16, 2008.

**Rodney Mouton,**

*Acting Field Manager.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

[NV912-1640-PH-006F; 08-08807; TAS: 14X1109]

#### **Notice of Public Meeting: Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council, Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council, and Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council, Nevada**

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

**ACTION:** Combined Resource Advisory Council Meeting.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management