

Dated: January 9, 2015.

Melanie J. Gray,

Program Analyst, Office of Federal Advisory Committee Policy.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R2-ES-2015-N003;
FXES11130200000-156-FF02ENEH00]

Endangered and Threatened Species Permit Applications

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of receipt of applications; request for public comment.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, invite the public to comment on the following applications to conduct certain activities with endangered or threatened species. The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), prohibits activities with endangered and threatened species unless a Federal permit allows such activities. Both the Act and the National Environmental Policy Act require that we invite public comment before issuing these permits.

DATES: To ensure consideration, written comments must be received on or before February 17, 2015.

ADDRESSES: Susan Jacobsen, Chief, Division of Classification and Restoration, by U.S. mail at Division of Classification and Recovery, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103; or by telephone at 505-248-6920. Please refer to the respective permit number for each application when submitting comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Susan Jacobsen, Chief, Division of Classification and Restoration, by U.S. mail at P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103; or by telephone at 505-248-6920.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) prohibits activities with endangered and threatened species unless a Federal permit allows such activities. Along with our implementing regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 50 CFR 17, the Act provides for permits, and requires that we invite public comment before issuing these permits.

A permit granted by us under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Act authorizes applicants to conduct activities with U.S. endangered or threatened species for scientific purposes, enhancement of

survival or propagation, or interstate commerce. Our regulations regarding implementation of section 10(a)(1)(A) permits are found at 50 CFR 17.22 for endangered wildlife species, 50 CFR 17.32 for threatened wildlife species, 50 CFR 17.62 for endangered plant species, and 50 CFR 17.72 for threatened plant species.

Applications Available for Review and Comment

We invite local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies and the public to comment on the following applications. Please refer to the appropriate permit number (*e.g.*, Permit No. TE-123456) when requesting application documents and when submitting comments.

Documents and other information the applicants have submitted with these applications are available for review, subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a) and Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552).

Permit TE-819477

Applicant: Parametrix, Inc., Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Applicant requests a renewal to a current permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys of the following species within New Mexico:

- Interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum*)
- Jemez Mountain salamander (*Plethodon neomexicanus*)
- Loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*)
- Northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*)
- Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)
- Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)
- Spikedace (*Meda fulgida*)

Permit TE-829761

Applicant: U.S. Bureau of Land Management—Las Cruces District Office, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Applicant requests a renewal to a current permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys of the following species within Arizona and New Mexico:

- Lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris yerbabuena*)
- Loach minnow (*Tiaroga cobitis*)
- Mexican long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris nivalis*)
- Northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*)
- Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)
- Spikedace (*Meda fulgida*)

Permit TE-819528

Applicant: Natural Heritage New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Applicant requests a renewal to a current permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys for northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis*) and presence/absence surveys and nest monitoring of southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) within New Mexico.

Permit TE-66055A

Applicant: Navajo Nation Zoological and Botanical Park, Window Rock, Arizona.

Applicant requests a new permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct husbandry and holding of black footed ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*) at the zoo within Arizona.

Permit TE-833866

Applicant: Texas Forest Service, Lufkin, Texas.

Applicant requests a renewal to a current permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys, cavity searches, capture and band, and install restrictor plates for red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) within Texas.

Permit TE-094365

Applicant: Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Applicant requests a new permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys, seining, and capture and release of leopard darter (*Percina pantherina*) and Neosho madtom (*Noturus placidus*) within Oklahoma.

Permit TE-54802B

Applicant: Megan Phillips-Schaap, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Applicant requests a new permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct presence/absence surveys of American burying beetle (*Nicrophorus americanus*) within Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Permit TE-091551

Applicant: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Mexican Wolf Recovery Program, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Applicant requests a renewal to a current permit for research and recovery purposes to conduct the following activities for Mexican gray wolf (*Canis lupis baileyi*) within Arizona and New Mexico: Capture, including, but not limited to, leg-hold traps, helicopter or ground darting and net-gunning, and captive capture methods; handle; possession; administration of health care; propagation; radio collar or other

marking techniques; release; obtain and preserve blood, tissue, semen, ova, and other samples that are considered parts of a wolf and can be collected without a permit); translocate; transport between approved Mexican wolf captive management facilities in the United States and Mexico, to approved release sites, and to and from the Vermejo Park Ranch; purposeful lethal take (lethal control is limited to Mexican wolves within the MWEPA in Arizona and New Mexico); hazing via less-than-lethal projectiles; injurious harassment; research; and any other USFWS-approved husbandry practice or management action for Mexican wolves.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In compliance with NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), we have made an initial determination that the proposed activities in these permits are categorically excluded from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement (516 DM 6 Appendix 1, 1.4C(1)).

Public Availability of Comments

All comments and materials we receive in response to this request will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the address listed in the **ADDRESSES** section 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.

Authority

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

Dated: January 8, 2015.

Joy E. Nicholopoulos,

Acting Regional Director, Southwest Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 2015-00551 Filed 1-14-15; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-HQ-R-2014-N231;
FXRS12650900000-145-FF09R20000]

RIN 1018-AZ89

Final Strategic Growth Policy for the National Wildlife Refuge System

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has finalized a policy to implement a strategic approach to the growth of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System, System). The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (Administration Act), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, requires that we “plan and direct the continued growth of the System in a manner that is best designed to accomplish the mission of the System.” This policy directs Refuge System employees to focus their protection measures on priority conservation features to ensure that our limited resources are used to make the greatest contribution to the conservation of species in a cost-effective and transparent manner. It ensures that the growth of the System reflects our vision toward managing functional landscapes, enhancing our scientific rigor, improving our effectiveness, and involving our partners and the American people. The Strategic Growth policy is found in “Refuge Planning,” chapter 5, part 602 in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

DATES: The policy was effective September 4, 2014.

ADDRESSES: You may read the final policy online at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/602fw5.html>. You may obtain a summary of how we addressed comments we received on the draft policy at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/planning/StrategicGrowth.html>. You may also request a copy of the policy by U.S. mail from USFWS, Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803 (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**). The policy is also available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brian Salem, at the address above, or by telephone: (703) 358-2397.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Introduction

The Service has established a final Strategic Growth policy, which is available at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/602fw5.html>. The policy is chapter 5, part 602, “Refuge Planning,” in the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual. The purpose of the policy is to implement a strategic approach to the growth of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Background

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Improvement Act), which amended the Administration Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd-ee), states that the Refuge System mission is to “administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” The Improvement Act requires us to “plan and direct the continued growth of the System in a manner that is best designed to accomplish the mission of the System,” “to fulfill the mission of the System, as well as the specific purposes for which [the] refuge was established,” and to “ensure timely and effective cooperation and collaboration with Federal agencies and State fish and wildlife agencies during the course of acquiring and managing refuges.” Because we are facing unparalleled challenges related to climate and non-climate stressors, we must provide consistent direction for adding lands and waters to the System in a science-based, cost-effective, and transparent manner. The Strategic Growth policy is a result of this need for strategic and consistent planning.

Final Policy

The policy prioritizes acquisitions within existing refuge boundaries, expansion of existing refuges, and establishment of new refuges. It focuses protection measures on priority conservation features so that we can make the most of our limited resources.

The policy is consistent with the biological planning and conservation design components of *Strategic Habitat Conservation*, the Service’s science-based adaptive management framework for determining where and how to deliver conservation efficiently to achieve specific biological outcomes. The policy identifies threatened and endangered species, migratory birds of conservation concern, and waterfowl, or the surrogate species that represent them, as priority conservation features.

The policy requires application of the best available science to incorporate