

inconsistent with the requirements of the ESA.

*Response 3:* Some commenters took issue with the explanations in the Handbook, particularly in Chapter 9, of the ESA requirement that applicants must “to the maximum extent practicable, minimize and mitigate the impacts of” permitted taking. Some commenters interpreted these explanations and related discussions of the concept of “fully offset,” as creating an alternative or substitute for the ESA’s statutory “maximum extent practicable” standard. However, the Handbook explains the ESA standard and clarifies the discussion that was in the 1996 Handbook. It does not establish a new or alternative standard for minimization and mitigation.

We acknowledge that the manner in which this topic was presented in the draft may be confusing. Therefore, we have modified the language to provide clearer guidance that is consistent with the ESA’s “maximum extent practicable” standard. We have also revised the language to better explain how applicants can meet the ESA’s “maximum extent practicable” standard.

*Comment 4:* The guidance on climate change in the Handbook goes too far. Applicants should not have to come up with complex models or complex global climate change scenarios.

*Response 4:* We have clarified that climate change effects that could impact the applicant’s proposed conservation strategy and the durability of mitigation should be considered in the HCP. In addition, we changed all references of “climate change” to “climate change effects,” in order to reduce confusion. Furthermore, applicants are not responsible for addressing climate change at a global scale.

Regarding the comments concerning complex modeling, we suggest the use of various models to help applicants consider the effects of climate change while developing their conservation strategy. The Handbook does not impose a requirement to use specific models.

*Comment 5:* The draft HCP Handbook undermines the “No Surprises” rule.

*Response 5:* One of our main goals with this HCP Handbook revision was to incorporate lessons learned throughout our 30 years of program implementation in order to better address the possibility of changed or unforeseen circumstances by using tools such as adaptive management and better advance planning. With “No Surprises,” State and private landowners are assured that if “unforeseen circumstances” arise, the Services will not require the commitment of additional activities or

additional restrictions beyond the level otherwise agreed to in the HCP without the consent of the permit holder.

The Handbook does not change or undermine the “no surprises” rule, but rather it encourages applicants to consider a robust list of potential changed and unforeseen circumstances that could arise during the permit term. This will ensure successful implementation of the HCP and help to ensure that the conservation strategy and mitigation plan will endure in perpetuity, as required by the incidental take permit issuance criteria. We have provided clarifying language regarding the “No Surprises” rule.

*Comment 6:* The term “mitigation” is used throughout the Handbook, and there is no clear description about what mitigation actually means.

*Response 6:* The Handbook treats mitigation in a manner consistent with the requirements and legal authorities provided by the ESA. We acknowledge that our use of the term “mitigation” in the draft was sometimes confusing. We have clarified our treatment of the ESA section 10 mitigation requirements and also provided additional background, including the definition of mitigation and general principles of Federal mitigation policy as described in the November 3, 2015, Presidential Memorandum on mitigation. These clarifications can be found primarily in Chapter 9.

*Comment 7:* Please clarify whether the HCP Handbook is guidance or policy.

*Response 7:* The HCP Handbook is a Services guidance document that includes reference to respective agency policies (and citations) where appropriate.

*Comment 8:* Contrary to the statements in the Handbook, the Services cannot require that all ESA-listed species that applicants expect they may take from proposed covered activities be covered by the HCP and incidental take permit. The Services should clarify that it is up to applicants to decide which species to include as covered species.

*Comment 8:* Ultimately, it is the Services who determine if the applicant’s incidental take permit application is complete. If the application does not include all of the ESA-listed wildlife species that we are reasonably certain may be taken as a result of the covered activities, then the Services would consider the application incomplete. Therefore, to ensure the applicant provides a complete incidental take permit application, the revised final version of the Handbook states, “The Services require applicants

to include as HCP-covered species all ESA-listed wildlife species for which incidental take is reasonably certain to occur, unless take is addressed through a separate ESA mechanism (e.g., section 7 consultation with another Federal agency, separate incidental take permit, etc.), or to explain or demonstrate in the HCP why the applicant does not anticipate take or will avoid take during implementation of covered activities (e.g., inclusion of measures that will avoid potential for take).” In the view of the Services, this best reflects the language, structure, and congressional purposes of ESA section 10 and the ESA as a whole. In addition, it is important to note that section 9 prohibitions make it illegal for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to take any wildlife species listed as endangered (and threatened through FWS regulations), without written authorization.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*

Dated: December 7, 2016.

James W. Kurth,  
Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dated: December 8, 2016

Samuel D. Rauch, III,  
Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2016–30673 Filed 12–20–16; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE P**

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS–HQ–R–2016–N214];  
[FXGO1664091HCC0–FF09D00000–178]

### Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council; Public Meeting

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of meeting.

**SUMMARY:** We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announce a public meeting of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (Council). The Council provides advice about wildlife and habitat conservation endeavors that benefit wildlife resources; encourage partnership among the public, sporting conservation organizations, States, Native American tribes, and the Federal Government; and benefit recreational hunting.

**DATES:** Meeting: Tuesday, February 7, 2017, from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Wednesday, February 8, 2017, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time). For deadlines and directions on

registering to attend, submitting written material, and giving an oral presentation, please see Public Input under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

**ADDRESSES:** The meeting will be held in Room 5160 at the Main Interior Building, 1849 C Street NW., Washington DC 20240.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Joshua Winchell, Council Designated Federal Officer, by U.S. mail at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803; by telephone at (703) 358-2639; or by email at [joshua\\_winchell@fws.gov](mailto:joshua_winchell@fws.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** In accordance with the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. App., we announce that the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council will hold a meeting.

**Background**

Formed in February 2010, the Council provides advice about wildlife and habitat conservation endeavors that:

1. Benefit wildlife resources;
2. Encourage partnership among the public, sporting conservation organizations, States, Native American tribes, and the Federal Government; and
3. Benefit recreational hunting.

The Council advises the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, reporting through the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in consultation with the Director, Bureau of Land Management (BLM); Director, National Park Service (NPS); Chief, Forest Service (USFS); Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); and Administrator, Farm Services Agency (FSA). The Council's duties are strictly advisory and consist of, but are not limited to, providing recommendations for:

1. Implementing the Recreational Hunting and Wildlife Resource Conservation Plan—A Ten-Year Plan for Implementation;
2. Increasing public awareness of and support for the Wildlife Restoration Program;
3. Fostering wildlife and habitat conservation and ethics in hunting and shooting sports recreation;
4. Stimulating sportsmen and women's participation in conservation and management of wildlife and habitat resources through outreach and education;
5. Fostering communication and coordination among State, tribal, and Federal governments; industry; hunting and shooting sportsmen and women; wildlife and habitat conservation and

management organizations; and the public;

6. Providing appropriate access to Federal lands for recreational shooting and hunting;

7. Providing recommendations to improve implementation of Federal conservation programs that benefit wildlife, hunting, and outdoor recreation on private lands; and

8. When requested by the Designated Federal Officer in consultation with the Council Chairperson, performing a variety of assessments or reviews of policies, programs, and efforts through the Council's designated subcommittees or workgroups.

Background information on the Council is available at <http://www.fws.gov/whhcc>.

**Meeting Agenda**

The Council will convene to consider issues including:

1. Wildlife habitat and health;
2. Funding for public lands and wildlife management;
3. Endangered Species Act; and
4. Other Council business.

The final agenda will be posted on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/whhcc>.

**Attendance**

To attend this meeting, register by close of business on the dates listed in Public Input. Please submit your name, time of arrival, email address, and phone number to the Council Designated Federal Officer (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

**Public Input**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| If you wish to   | You must contact the Council Designated Federal Officer (see <b>FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT</b> ) no later than |
| Attend the meeting .....   | January 26, 2017.   |
| Submit written information or questions before the meeting for the council to consider during the meeting. | January 26, 2017.   |
| Give an oral presentation during the meeting.  | January 26, 2017.   |

*Submitting Written Information or Questions*

Interested members of the public may submit relevant information or questions for the Council to consider during the public meeting. Written statements must be received by the date in Public Input, so that the information may be made available to the Council for their consideration prior to this

meeting. Written statements must be supplied to the Council Designated Federal Officer in both of the following formats: One hard copy with original signature, and one electronic copy via email (acceptable file formats are Adobe Acrobat PDF, MS Word, MS PowerPoint, or rich text file).

*Giving an Oral Presentation*

Individuals or groups requesting to make an oral presentation at the meeting will be limited to 2 minutes per speaker, with no more than a total of 30 minutes for all speakers. Interested parties should contact the Council Designated Federal Officer, in writing (preferably via email; see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**), to be placed on the public speaker list for this meeting. Nonregistered public speakers will not be considered during the meeting. Registered speakers who wish to expand upon their oral statements, or those who had wished to speak but could not be accommodated on the agenda, may submit written statements to the Council Designated Federal Officer up to 30 days subsequent to the meeting.

**Meeting Minutes**

Summary minutes of the conference will be maintained by the Council Designated Federal Officer (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**). They will be available for public inspection within 90 days of the meeting, and will be posted on the Council's Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/whhcc>.

**Joshua Winchell,**

*Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

[FR Doc. 2016-30749 Filed 12-20-16; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 4333-15-P**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Geological Survey**

[GX.17.MR00.G74E4.00]

**Agency Information Collection Activities: Request for Comments**

**AGENCY:** U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of revision of a currently approved information collection, (1028-0098).

**SUMMARY:** We (the U.S. Geological Survey) are notifying the public that we have submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) the information collection request (ICR) described below. To comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) and as part of our continuing efforts to reduce paperwork and respondent