

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 223****DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Fish and Wildlife Service****50 CFR Part 17****[I.D. 022803A]****Endangered and Threatened Wildlife;
Revision of the Loggerhead Sea Turtle
Recovery Plan**

AGENCIES: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce, and Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Interior.

ACTION: Notice to announce the revision of the loggerhead sea turtle recovery plan; request for information.

SUMMARY: We, NMFS and USFWS, announce our intention to revise the 1991 recovery plan for the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), listed as threatened throughout its range, under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended. The 1991 recovery plan addressed recovery needs for the U.S. population of the loggerhead in the northwestern Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. A comprehensive revision of the 1991 recovery plan is needed to incorporate an abundance of new information on the biology and population status of the loggerhead and to provide an updated framework for addressing problems of the species and for prioritizing actions necessary for recovery. To ensure a comprehensive revision, we are soliciting information on the loggerhead population status and trends, threats and conservation efforts.

DATES: Information related to this notice must be received by May 5, 2003, to be considered in the initial stages of the revision. However, we will accept information and comments submitted after this date, for consideration at later stages in the recovery process, until further notice.

ADDRESSES: Information should be addressed to the National Sea Turtle Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 6620 Southpoint Drive South, Suite 310, Jacksonville, FL 32216. Information may also be sent via fax to 904-232-2404 or through the internet website address for the loggerhead recovery plan at <http://northflorida.fws.gov/SeaTurtles/loggerhead-recovery/default-loggerhead.htm>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Barbara Schroeder (ph. 301-713-1401, fax 301-713-0376, e-mail Barbara.Schroeder@noaa.gov) or Sandy MacPherson (ph. 904-232-2580, fax 904-232-2404, e-mail sandy_macpherson@fws.gov).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

The loggerhead was listed as threatened under the ESA in 1978. Upon listing a species, section 4(f) of the ESA requires the preparation and implementation of a recovery plan and revisions to such plans as necessary. Under section 4(f)(1)(B), each plan, at a minimum, must contain: (a) A description of such site-specific management actions as may be necessary to achieve the plan's goal for the conservation and survival of the species; (b) objective, measurable criteria that, when met, would result in a determination, in accordance with the provisions of this section, that the species be removed from the list; and (c) estimates of the time required and the cost to carry out those measures needed to achieve the plan's goal and to achieve intermediate steps toward that goal.

In addition, recovery plans must include a concise summary of the current status of the species and its life history, and an assessment of the factors that led to population declines and/or which are impeding recovery. The plan must also include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program for gauging the effectiveness of recovery measures and overall progress toward recovery.

Conservation and recovery of listed sea turtles, including the loggerhead, are the joint responsibility of NMFS and USFWS. In 1984, we issued a multi-species recovery plan for listed sea turtles in the southeastern United States region. This plan was revisited in the early 1990's culminating in an individual species recovery plan for the loggerhead in the northwestern Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico in 1991. In 2001, we initiated the process to revise the plan for a second time. An Atlantic Loggerhead Sea Turtle Recovery Team, consisting of species experts, was established to draft this revision.

Since the development of the 1991 plan, significant research has been accomplished and important conservation and recovery activities have been undertaken. As a result, we have a greater knowledge of the species and its status. These advances in our understanding of the loggerhead turtle make a second revision to the recovery plan necessary. The revised recovery

plan will serve as a basis for future recovery efforts, guide research to ensure that new information will contribute toward the greatest research needs, and enable effective monitoring to allow us to track the status of the loggerhead and the factors that may affect the species.

A schedule for completing the revised recovery plan is available on the internet website address for the loggerhead recovery plan (see ADDRESSES). Draft sections of the Work in Progress will also be made available on the internet website to provide interested stakeholders an opportunity to review and provide input on the revised plan during its development. Once all sections of the revised plan have been drafted, we will publish a notice of availability of the draft recovery plan in the **Federal Register** and will formally solicit public comment on the draft prior to finalizing the plan.

To ensure that the revised recovery plan is based on the best available data, we are soliciting information on historical and current abundance; historical and current distribution and movements; population status and trends; genetic stock identification; current or planned activities that may adversely impact the species; and ongoing efforts to protect the loggerhead in the northwestern Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. We request that all data, information, and comments be accompanied by supporting documentation such as maps, bibliographic references, or reprints of pertinent publications.

All submissions must contain the submitter's name, address, and any association, institution, or business that the person represents. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the USFWS' Jacksonville Field Office (see ADDRESSES).

Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Respondents may request that we withhold their home address, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish for us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this request prominently at the beginning of your comment. However, we will not consider anonymous comments. To the extent consistent with

applicable law, we will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

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

Dated: March 14, 2003.

Phil Williams,

Chief, Endangered Species Division, National Marine Fisheries Service

Dated: March 5, 2003.

Sam D. Hamilton,

Regional Director, Southeast Region, Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

RIN 1018-A121

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus* (Ventura marsh milk-vetch)

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule; reopening of comment period and notice of availability of draft economic analysis.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announce the reopening of the comment period for the proposed designation of critical habitat for the threatened *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus* (Ventura marsh milk-vetch) in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, California, and the availability of the draft economic analysis for the proposed designation of critical habitat. We are reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule and the associated draft economic analysis. Comments previously submitted on the proposed critical habitat rule that was published in the **Federal Register** on October 9, 2002 (67 FR 62926), need not be resubmitted as they will be incorporated into the public record as part of this reopened comment period and will be fully considered in the final rule.

DATES: We will accept public comments until April 21, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Comments and information should be sent to the Field Supervisor,

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, CA 93003.

Written comments may also be sent by fax to 805/644-3958 or hand-delivered to our office at the above address. You may also send comments by electronic mail (e-mail). For instructions, see Public Comments Solicited under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rick Farris or Anna Toline of the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office at 805/644-1766.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On October 9, 2002, we proposed to designate approximately 170 ha (420 ac) of land in three units in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties as critical habitat for *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus* (67 FR 62926). We accepted public comments on this proposed rule until December 9, 2002. Private lands comprise approximately 33 percent of the proposed critical habitat, and State lands comprise 67 percent. No Federal lands are proposed for inclusion. No federally listed animal species are known to occur on the proposed critical habitat units.

Critical habitat receives protection from destruction or adverse modification through required consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), with regard to actions carried out, funded, or authorized by a Federal agency. Section 4(b)(2) of the Act requires that we designate or revise critical habitat on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available, after taking into consideration the economic and any other relevant impact of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. Based upon the previously published proposal to designate critical habitat for *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus*, we have prepared a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation. The economic analysis shows that the proposed designation is not likely to result in any consultation costs pursuant to section 7 of the Act. As a result, the analysis concluded that the potential economic cost attributed to the proposed designation is expected to be \$0. The draft analysis is available on the Internet and from the mailing address in the **ADDRESSES** section above. We are reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule and the associated draft economic analysis.

Public Comments Solicited

We have reopened the comment period at this time in order to accept the best and most current scientific and commercial data available regarding the proposed critical habitat determination for *Astragalus pycnostachyus* var. *lanosissimus*, and the draft economic analysis associated with the designation of critical habitat. Previously submitted written comments on the critical habitat proposal need not be resubmitted. We will accept written comments and information during this reopened comment period. If you wish to comment, you may submit your comments and materials concerning this proposal by any of several methods:

You may mail or hand-deliver written comments and information to the Field Supervisor (*see ADDRESSES* section). Hand deliveries must be made during normal business hours.

You may send comments by electronic mail (e-mail) to: fw1venturamilkvetch@fws.gov. If you submit comments by e-mail, please submit them as an ASCII file and avoid the use of any special characters and any form of encryption. Also, please include "Attn: RIN 1018-A121" and your name and return address in your e-mail message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we have received your e-mail message, contact the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office at 805/644-1766.

Comments and materials received, as well as supporting documentation used in preparation of the proposal to designate critical habitat and the draft economic analysis, will be available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the address above. You may obtain copies of the draft economic analysis on the Internet at <http://www.r1.fws.gov>, or by writing to the Field Supervisor at the address above.

Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this request prominently at the beginning of your comments. However, we will not consider anonymous comments. To the extent consistent with applicable law, we will make all submissions for organizations or businesses, and from individuals