

growing shrubs and a high diversity of both perennial and annual plants.

The desert tortoise occurs in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts in southern California, southern Nevada, Arizona, and the southwestern tip of Utah in the United States, as well as in Sonora and northern Sinaloa in Mexico. The listed Mojave population of the desert tortoise includes those animals living north and west of the Colorado River in the Mojave Desert of California, Nevada, Arizona, and southwestern Utah, and in the Sonoran (Colorado) Desert in California. The first recovery plan was published in 1994, and critical habitat was also designated in all four States supporting the species.

Three tortoise species in the genus *Gopherus* occur in the United States, and another occurs in Mexico; however, all are geographically separated from the Mojave population. With the exception of a geographically undefined Mojave-genotype population (that also shares Mojave phenotype and habitat-use characteristics with the Mojave population) in the vicinity of the Black Mountains in Mohave County, Arizona, the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise is significantly different both genetically and ecologically, but it could be confused visually with tortoises of the Mojave population; therefore, the Service determined the Sonoran population also warranted protection as a threatened species under section 4(e) of the Endangered Species Act (similarity of appearance) when located outside of its natural range. On December 14, 2010, in response to a petition to list the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise under the Endangered Species Act, the Service found that listing the Sonoran population is warranted but precluded by higher priority actions to amend the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

The vast majority of threats to the desert tortoise or its habitat are associated with human land uses. The threats identified in the 1994 Recovery Plan, and that formed the basis for listing the tortoise as a threatened species, continue to affect the species. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation from urbanization, off-highway vehicle use in the desert, linear features such as roads and utility corridors, poor grazing management and mining, and military activities were cited as some of the primary reasons for the decline in desert tortoise populations. Disease and increased incidence of fire in the Mojave Desert have also been implicated in desert tortoise declines.

Despite clear demonstration that these threats impact individual tortoises, there are few data available to evaluate or quantify the effects of threats on desert tortoise populations. While current research results can lead to predictions about how local tortoise abundance should be affected by the presence of threats, quantitative estimates of the magnitude of these threats, or of their relative importance, have not yet been developed. Thus, it would be challenging to recover the desert tortoise by singling out a particular threat or subset of threats to the exclusion of others. In the revised recovery plan, we underscore the need to build on our understanding of individual threats but also place new emphasis on understanding their multiple and synergistic effects, due to the failure of simple threat models to inform us about tortoise abundance.

The revised strategy emphasizes partnerships to direct and maintain focus on implementing recovery actions, and a system to track implementation and effectiveness of those actions. The strategic elements listed in the revised Recovery Plan are part of a multi-faceted approach designed to improve the 1994 Recovery Plan. The goals of the revised recovery plan are recovery and delisting of the desert tortoise. The objectives and recovery criteria address demography (maintain self-sustaining populations of desert tortoises within each recovery unit into the future); distribution (maintain well-distributed populations of desert tortoises throughout each recovery unit); and habitat (ensure that habitat within each recovery unit is protected and managed to support long-term viability of desert tortoise populations).

The strategic elements include the following: (1) Develop, support, and build partnerships to facilitate recovery; (2) protect existing populations and habitat, instituting habitat restoration where necessary; (3) augment depleted populations in a strategic manner; (4) monitor progress toward recovery; (5) conduct applied research and modeling in support of recovery efforts within a strategic framework; and (6) implement a formal adaptive management program through which information gained while implementing the above strategic elements is used to revise and improve the recovery plan and recommend management actions on a regular basis. The success of this revised recovery strategy will rely heavily upon the involvement of our partners and our commitment to implementing the strategic elements listed above, coupled with a functioning adaptive management program.

We developed our recovery plan under the authority of section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f). We publish this notice under section 4(f) Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: August 22, 2011.

Ren Lohofener,

Regional Director, Pacific Southwest Region.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[LLNM922000 L13200000.EL0000; NMNM 126245]

Notice of Invitation To Participate; Coal Exploration License Application NMNM 126245, New Mexico

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended by the Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of 1976, and to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regulations, all interested parties are hereby invited to participate with the Peabody Natural Resources Company, on a pro rata cost-sharing basis, in a program for the exploration of coal deposits owned by the United States of America in lands located in McKinley County, New Mexico.

DATES: This notice of invitation will be published in the *Gallup Independent* newspaper once each week for 2 consecutive weeks beginning the week of August 22, 2011, and in the **Federal Register**. Any party electing to participate in this exploration program must send written notice referencing the Exploration License Application serial number NMNM 126245 to both the BLM and Peabody Natural Resources Company as provided in the **ADDRESSES** section below no later than 30 days after publication of this notice in the **Federal Register** or 10 calendar days after the last publication of this notice in the *Gallup Independent* newspaper, whichever is later.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the proposed exploration plan (case file NMNM 126245) are available for review from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday: BLM, New Mexico State Office, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, New Mexico; and BLM, Farmington Field Office, 1235 La Plata Highway, Suite A, Farmington, New Mexico.

The written notice should be sent to the following addresses: State Director, BLM, New Mexico State Office, P.O. Box 27115, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-0115 and Peabody Natural Resources Company, 701 Market Street, Suite 832, Saint Louis, Missouri 63101-1830.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Roberta D. Sandoval at 505-954-2161, rdssandov@blm.gov or Powell King 505-954-2160, pkking@blm.gov. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individuals during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individuals. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of the exploration program is to gain structural and quality information about the coal. The BLM regulations at 43 CFR 3410 require the publication of an invitation to participate in the coal exploration in the **Federal Register**. The Federal coal resources included in the exploration license application are located in the following described lands in McKinley County, New Mexico, and are described as follows:

NM Principal Meridian

- T. 15 N., R. 8 W.,
 Sec. 6, E $\frac{1}{2}$, and portion of E $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$ (lying east of road);
 Sec. 8, All;
 Sec. 18, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$;
 Sec. 20, SE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, and N $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$;
 Sec. 28, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, and portion of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ (lying west of Lee Ranch Coal Company permit boundary).
 T. 16 N., R. 8 W.,
 Sec. 6, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;
 Sec. 8, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, and portion of E $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ (lying south of road);
 Sec. 20, SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$;
 Sec. 30, E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$.
 T. 17 N., R. 9 W.,
 Sec. 34, All.
 Containing 2,678.00 acres, more or less.

The proposed exploration program is fully described in, and will be conducted pursuant to, an exploration plan to be approved by the BLM.

Michael Tupper,

Acting Deputy State Director, Minerals.

Authority: 43 CFR 3410.2-1(c)(1).
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[LLAZP02000.L16100000
 .DQ0000.LXSS089A0000.241A]

Notice of Availability of the Draft Resource Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Lower Sonoran and Sonoran Desert National Monument, AZ

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Lower Sonoran (LS) and Sonoran Desert National Monument (SDNM) Planning Area, and by this notice, is announcing the opening of a 90-day comment period.

DATES: To ensure that comments will be considered, the BLM must receive written comments on the Draft RMP/EIS within 90 days following the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes their notice of the Draft RMP/EIS in the **Federal Register**. The BLM will announce future meetings or hearings and any other public participation activities at least 15 days in advance through public notices, media releases, and/or mailings.

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments related to the LS-SDNM Draft RMP/EIS by any of the following methods:

- *E-mail:*
blm_az_ls_sdnm_plan@blm.gov.
- *Fax:* 623-580-5580.
- *Mail or in person:* BLM Phoenix District Office, Attention: LS-SDNM Draft RMP/EIS, 21605 North 7th Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85027.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Penny Foreman, RMP Project Manager, telephone: 623-580-5526; BLM Phoenix District, 21605 North 7th Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85027; e-mail: blm_az_ls_sdnm_plan@blm.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Copies of the LS-SDNM Draft RMP/EIS are available in the BLM Phoenix District Office, at the above address, and at the following other locations:

- http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/planning/son_des/reports.html.
- BLM Arizona State Office, One North Central Avenue, Suite 800, Phoenix, Arizona 85004-4427.

- Apache Junction Public Library, 1177 N. Idaho Road, Apache Junction, Arizona 85219.

- Buckeye Public Library, 310 North 6th Street, Buckeye, Arizona 85326.

- Casa Grande Public Library, 449 North Dry Lake, Casa Grande, Arizona 85222.

- Gila Bend Public Library, 202 North Euclid Avenue, Gila Bend, Arizona 85337.

- Salazar-Ajo Branch Library, 33 Plaza, Ajo, Arizona 85321.

The LS-SDNM Planning Area includes approximately 8.9 million acres of public and private lands, containing about 1.4 million surface acres, and 3.9 million subsurface/mineral-split estate acres administered by the BLM. These include about 930,200 surface acres in the Lower Sonoran Field Office, referred to as the LS Decision Area, and 486,400 surface acres within the Sonoran Desert National Monument, referred to as the SDNM Decision Area.

Public scoping took place in 2002 and 2003, when two separate Notices of Intent for the LS and SDNM planning efforts were published, and 11 public scoping meetings were held. The planning efforts also included cooperation and collaboration with Federal, State, county, and local agencies, as well as 13 Tribes. The plan will consolidate or replace management guidance from the Lower Gila North Management Framework Plan of 1983, the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan of 1988, the Phoenix Resource Area Resource Management Plan of 1989, and five plan amendments implemented between 1983 and 2005. A new RMP for the SDNM will fulfill Presidential Proclamation 7397 requirements to protect the special qualities and objects for which the Monument was designated. Scoping issues identified include wilderness characteristics, livestock grazing, recreational target and sports shooting, travel management, and energy development.

Five alternatives are analyzed in the Draft RMP/EIS. The "no action" alternative, Alternative A, represents the current management situation for both the LS and the SDNM Decision Areas and serves as a baseline for most resource and land-use allocations.

Alternative B identifies the greatest amount of public lands suitable for appropriate multiple uses, emphasizing opportunities for motorized and developed recreational uses while reducing opportunities for experiencing remote settings and non-motorized recreation.