

and the Great Dismal Swamp State Park in North Carolina, management will continue to focus on restoring the hydrological regime to as close to historical conditions as possible given the necessity for firebreaks and access roads. In addition, efforts are being made to restore or maintain the habitat mosaic through forestry practices. It is the opinion of the Service that sufficient habitat will remain over the long-term to allow for the continued viability of this subspecies.

Public Comments Solicited

The Service intends that any final action resulting from this proposal will be as accurate and as effective as possible. Therefore, comments or suggestions from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning this proposed rule are hereby solicited. Comments particularly are sought concerning:

(1) Biological, commercial trade (legal and illegal), or other relevant data concerning any threat (or lack thereof) to the Dismal Swamp southeastern shrew;

(2) The location of any additional populations or occurrences of this species;

(3) Additional information concerning the range, distribution, and population size of this species;

(4) Current or planned activities in the subject area and their possible impacts on this species; and

(5) The number, origin, location and legal deposition of individuals of this species in captivity and/or trade.

Promulgation of the final regulations on this species will take into consideration the comments and any additional information received by the Service, and such communications may lead to a final regulation that differs from this proposal.

The Endangered Species Act provides for one or more public hearings on this proposal, if requested. Requests must be received within 45 days of the date of publication of this proposal in the **Federal Register**. Such requests must be made in writing and addressed to the Field Supervisor (see **ADDRESSES** section).

Executive Order 12866 requires each agency to write regulations that are easy to understand. We invite your comments on how to make this rule easier to understand including answers to questions such as the following: (1) Are the requirements in the rule clearly stated? (2) Does the rule contain technical language or jargon that interferes with its clarity? (3) Does the

format of the rule (grouping and order of sections, use of headings, paragraphing, etc.) aid or reduce its clarity? (4) Would the rule be easier to understand if it were divided into more (but shorter) sections? (A "section" appears in bold type and is preceded by the symbol "\$" and a numbered heading; for example, § 17.11 Endangered and threatened wildlife.) (5) Is the description of the rule in the "Supplementary Information" section of the preamble helpful in understanding the rule? What else could we do to make the rule easier to understand?

National Environmental Policy Act

The Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements, as defined under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, need not be prepared in connection with regulations adopted pursuant to Section 4(a) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. A notice outlining the Service's reasons for this determination was published in the **Federal Register** on October 25, 1983 (48 FR 49244).

Required Determinations

This rule does not include any collections of information that require approval by the Office of Management and Budget under 44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*

References Cited

A complete list of all references cited herein is available upon request from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Field Office (see **ADDRESSES** section).

Author

The primary author of this document is Cynthia A. Schulz (see **ADDRESSES** section).

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and threatened species, Exports, Imports, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Transportation.

Proposed Regulation Promulgation

Accordingly, the Service hereby proposes to amend part 17, subchapter B of chapter I, title 50 Code of Federal Regulations, as set forth below:

PART 17—[AMENDED]

1. The authority citation for part 17 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1361–1407; 16 U.S.C. 1531–1544; 16 U.S.C. 4201–4245; Pub. L. 99–625, 100 Stat. 3500; unless otherwise noted.

§ 17.11 [Amended]

2. Amend § 17.11(h) by removing the entry for "Shrew, Dismal Swamp southeastern, *Sorex longirostris fisheri*" under "Mammals" from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.

Dated: October 6, 1998.

Jamie Rappaport Clark,

Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 98–28189 Filed 10–20–98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

RIN 1018–AE84

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Reopening of Public Comment Period on the Proposed Rule To List the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel as Threatened

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule, reopening of comment period.

SUMMARY: The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) provides notice that the public comment period on the proposed rule to list the northern Idaho ground squirrel (*Spermophilus brunneus brunneus*) as a threatened species is being reopened to consider new scientific information received after the initial comment period. The initial comment period closed on May 22, 1998. All interested parties are invited to submit comments on this proposal.

DATES: The comment period for this proposal will be extended to November 20, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and materials concerning this proposal should be sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 South Vinnell way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Robert Ruesink, Supervisor, at the above address or at telephone (208) 378–5243.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

On March 23, 1998 (63 FR 13825), the Service published in the **Federal Register** a proposed rule to list the northern Idaho ground squirrel as threatened throughout its range in western Idaho pursuant to the

Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. After the close of the comment period on May 22, 1998, the Service received a report titled "Translocation and inventory of northern Idaho ground squirrels in 1998," a video seminar on the genetics and population structure of the northern Idaho ground squirrel presented by Drs. Tom Gavin and Paul Sherman, an "Amended Environmental Assessment of the Council-Cuprum Road," a draft plan titled "Habitat restoration plan for the northern Idaho ground squirrel," and meeting notes from two northern Idaho ground squirrel working group meetings.

The Service reviewed the status of the species under the five factors described in section 4(a)(1) and concluded that little is known about the historic range of the northern Idaho ground squirrel, but the population of this subspecies has declined significantly since 1985. The estimated total population in 1985 was about 5,000 animals but by 1998, the total population of this subspecies had declined to about 700 individuals. This subspecies is known from 21 sites in Adams and Valley Counties, Idaho. It is primarily threatened by habitat loss due to seral forest encroachment into former suitable meadow habitats. Seral forest encroachment results in habitat fragmentation, isolating northern Idaho ground squirrel sites from each other. This eliminates any genetic exchange or replenishment of sites should one population site decline and another one has a surplus of individuals. The northern Idaho ground squirrel is also threatened by competition from the larger Columbian ground squirrel (*Spermophilus columbianus*), land use changes, recreational shooting and naturally occurring events. A conservation agreement (Agreement) was finalized in July of 1996 between the Service and the Payette National Forest. Duration of the Agreement is 5 years. The Agreement identifies conservation and land management actions that will provide habitat favorable to the northern Idaho ground squirrel. A relocation plan developed by scientists from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York and Albertson College, Caldwell, Idaho was initiated in the spring of 1997. These ongoing conservation efforts for the northern Idaho ground squirrel address threats that have likely contributed to the species decline.

Public Comments Solicited

The previous comment period on this proposed rule closed on May 22, 1998. Written comments must be submitted to the Service office identified in the

ADDRESSES section above. All comments must be received before the close of the comment period to be considered.

Author: The author of this notice is Rich Howard, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office (see Addresses section).

Authority: The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: October 6, 1998.

Bill Shake,

Acting Regional Director.

[FR Doc. 98-27324 Filed 10-20-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 981014259-8259-01; I.D. 101498B]

RIN 0648-AL74

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fisheries

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Proposed specifications for the 1999 summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes specifications for the 1999 summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. The implementing regulations for the Fishery Management Plan for the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fisheries (FMP) require NMFS to publish specifications for the upcoming fishing year for each fishery and to provide an opportunity for public comment. The intent of these measures is to address overfishing of the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass resources.

DATES: Public comments must be received on or before November 16, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Copies of supporting documents used by the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committees and of the Environmental Assessment (EA)/Regulatory Impact Review (RIR)/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) are available from: Jon C. Rittgers, Acting Regional Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, One

Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2298.

Comments on the proposed specifications should be sent to: Jon C. Rittgers, Acting Regional Administrator, Northeast Region, NMFS, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2298. Mark on the outside of the envelope, "Comments—1999 Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Specifications."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary M. Grim, Fishery Management Specialist, (978) 281-9326.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The regulations implementing the FMP outline the process for specifying annually the catch limits for the commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as other management measures (e.g., mesh requirements, minimum fish sizes) for these fisheries. These measures are intended to achieve the annual targets (either a fishing mortality rate or an exploitation rate) set forth for each species in the FMP.

A Monitoring Committee for each species, made up of members from NMFS, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), and both the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, is required to review available information and recommend catch limits and other management measures necessary to achieve the target fishing mortality rate (F) or exploitation rate for each fishery, as specified in the FMP. The Council's Demersal Species Committee and the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) then consider the Monitoring Committee recommendations and any public comment in making their recommendations. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and Board made their annual recommendations at a joint meeting held August 17-20, 1998.

Summer Flounder

The target F specified in the FMP for 1999 is 0.24, the level of fishing that produces maximum yield per recruit, F_{max}. The total allowable landings (TAL) associated with the target F is allocated 60 percent to the commercial and 40 percent to the recreational sectors. NMFS did not conduct a stock assessment for summer flounder in 1998. As a result, the Council and Board considered 1999 projection results based on assessments from the 25th Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW 25), 1997 survey indices, and 1997 catch data.