

hormones in field collected northern spotted owl feces, and found those levels to be significantly higher in males having territories centered within 0.41 km (0.25 mi) of roads or areas of recent timber harvest. Gutiérrez and Tempel (*in litt.* 2002) collected similar data on California spotted owls. They found significant variation between samples, but that variation was not significantly correlated with habitat condition, road proximity, or exposure to noise from chainsaws.

Barred Owl Invasion. Historically, the barred owl was native to eastern north America and absent from the range of the California spotted owl. Barred owls have expanded their range into western North America, moving into the range of the California spotted owl from the north. Barred owl populations in California are increasing, especially in northwestern California, and the species has now been detected as far south as Nevada County, California, in the Sierra Nevada (Dark *et al.* 1998).

Barred owls have been documented to displace spotted owls from their territories and to hybridize with spotted owls (Dark *et al.* 1998). There is also circumstantial evidence that barred owls will prey on spotted owls (Leskiw and Gutiérrez 1998).

The barred owl invasion of western North America has probably been facilitated by alteration of habitats by humans. The barred owl is a forest species, but does not rely on late successional forests as spotted owls do. The establishment of riparian forests and the planting of trees that occurred simultaneously with human settlement of the northern great plains may have created habitat used by dispersing barred owls as they moved west across the midwestern United States and southern Canada. Barred owls readily use disturbed habitats, and logging in the Rocky Mountains, Cascades, and Sierra Nevada has probably facilitated their colonization of forests there.

In 2002, researchers on the Lassen Study Area found three pairs with combinations of spotted owls and "sparred owls" (spotted owl/barred owl hybrids), and one pair of barred owls. None of these birds reproduced. No other barred owls or sparred owl combinations were reported from the Sierra Study Area or the Sequoia Study Area. Other reports had not yet been received as of late October 2002 (Stine 2002).

The existing population of barred owls in the Sierra Nevada remains at a level below one percent that of spotted owls. Although barred owls may pose a substantial threat to California spotted owls at some point in the future, by

themselves, or in combination with other factors, they do not nor do other factors seem to pose now or in the foreseeable future a significant threat to the continued existence of the California spotted owl such that it warrants listing.

Finding

We have carefully assessed the best scientific and commercial information available regarding the past, present, and future threats faced by this species. We reviewed the petition, information available in our files, other published and unpublished information submitted to us during the public comment period following our 90-day petition finding, and consulted with recognized California spotted owl experts and other Federal and State resource agencies. On the basis of the best scientific and commercial information available, we find that listing the California spotted owl is not warranted at this time.

In making this finding, we recognize that there are indications that the California spotted owl may be experiencing an uncertain levels of decline in parts of its range based on demographic studies, and that the species may face threats from catastrophic fire and habitat modification related to reduction of the risk of catastrophic fire. We recognize the difficult trade-offs involving short-term risk of fuel treatments versus long term benefits of those treatments in reducing risks and improving habitat. We recognize other current threats to the species, its habitat, and its prey, including effects of drought and climate change on habitat; the potential spread of a new competitor/predator (the barred owl); and possible threats of disease.

We conclude that the overall magnitude of threats to the California spotted owl does not rise to the level that requires the protections of the Act. We will continue to monitor the status and management of the species. We will continue to accept additional information and comments from all concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning this finding.

References Cited

A complete list of all references cited is available on request from the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office (see **ADDRESSES** above).

Author

The primary authors of this document are Phil Detrich of the Yreka Fish Wildlife Office, Kenneth Sanchez of the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office,

and Darrin Thome of the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

Authority

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

Dated: February 7, 2003.

Steve Williams,

Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 03-3519 Filed 2-13-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel Meeting

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice announces a meeting of the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel. The meeting topics are identified in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

DATES: The Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel will meet from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, February 26, 2003, and 8:30 a.m. to noon, on Thursday, February 27, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel meeting will be held at the Springhill Suites, 24 Via De Luna, Pensacola Beach, Florida 32561. Phone 850-932-6000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission at 228-875-5912 or Sharon Gross, Executive Secretary, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force at 703-358-2308.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. I), this notice announces meetings of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel. The Task Force was established by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990.

The Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel was established under the auspices of the ANS Task Force in 2000 with administration and coordination provided by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. The purpose of the Panel is to advise and make recommendations to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force on issues relating to the Gulf of Mexico region of the United States that includes five Gulf

States: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. The Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel will discuss several topics at this meeting including: status of coordination of aquatic invasive species prevention, control, research, and outreach efforts; an update from Panel working groups; status and discussion of national legislation regarding aquatic invasive species; updates on the development of State ANS Plans; and a discussion of the 2002 Annual Report.

Minutes of the meeting will be maintained by the Executive Secretary, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, Suite 810, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22203-1622, and will be available for public inspection during regular business hours, Monday through Friday.

Dated: January 30, 2003.

Cathleen I. Short,

Co-Chair, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, Assistant Director—Fisheries and Habitat Conservation.

[FR Doc. 03-3744 Filed 2-13-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[CA-160-1220-PG]

Notice of Public Meeting, Carrizo Plain National Monument Advisory Committee

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (FACA), the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Carrizo Plain National Monument Advisory Committee will meet as indicated below.

DATES: The meeting will be held Saturday, March 8, 2003, at the Carrisa Plains School located approximately two miles west of the intersection of Soda Lake Road and Highway 58. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. The agenda calls for a discussion of the Charter which authorizes the committee to advise BLM on the management of the Carrizo Plain National Monument, and a general discussion of the committee's duties and function. The committee will be briefed on the status of the planning process to update the existing Carrizo Management Plan.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Larry Mercer, Public Affairs Officer, Bureau of Land Management, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93308, telephone 661-391-6010.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The 9 member Carrizo Plain Advisory Committee advises the Bureau of Land Management, through the Designated Federal Officer (Ron Fellows, BLM-Bakersfield Field Manager) on planning and management issues for the Carrizo Plain National Monument. At this meeting, topics to be discussed and business to be conducted include:

Orientation and future planning for Committee members.

Election of officers.

Briefing on BLM structure and issues.

Update on the planning process to date regarding the Carrizo Plain National Monument Resource Management Plan.

Discussion of Committee input on the planning process.

All meetings of the Committee are open to the public, and the public is invited to attend and participate. A time will be allocated for hearing public comments, and written comments may be submitted either at the meeting or to the address above. Depending on the number of persons wishing to comment and the time available, the time for individual oral comments may be limited.

Individuals who plan to attend and need special assistance such as sign language interpretation or other reasonable accommodations should contact the BLM as indicated above.

Dated: February 4, 2003.

Ron Fellows,

Field Manager.

[FR Doc. 03-3640 Filed 2-13-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-40-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Minerals Management Service

Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Central Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Oil and Gas Lease Sale 185

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.

ACTION: Final notice of sale 185.

SUMMARY: On March 19, 2003, MMS will open and publicly announce bids received for blocks offered in Central GOM Oil and Gas Lease Sale 185, pursuant to the OCS Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1331-1356, as amended) and the regulations issued thereunder (30 CFR Part 256).

The Final Notice of Sale 185 Package (FNOS 185) contains information essential to bidders, and bidders are charged with the knowledge of the documents contained in the Package.

DATES: Public bid reading will begin at 9 a.m., Wednesday, March 19, 2003, in the Hyatt Regency Conference Center (Cabildo Rooms), 500 Poydras Plaza, New Orleans, Louisiana. All times referred to in this document are local New Orleans times, unless otherwise specified.

ADDRESSES: Bidders can obtain an FNOS 185 containing this Notice of Sale and several supporting and essential documents referenced herein from the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region Public Information Unit, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394, (504) 736-2519 or (800) 200-GULF, or via the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region Internet site at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov>.

Filing of Bids: Bidders must submit sealed bids to the Regional Director (RD), MMS Gulf of Mexico Region, 1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard, New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on normal working days, prior to the Bid Submission Deadline of 10 a.m., Tuesday, March 18, 2003. If bids are mailed, the envelope containing all of the sealed bids must be marked as follows:

Attention: Mr. John L. Rodi
Contains Sealed Bids for Sale 185

If the RD receives bids later than the time and date specified above, he will return those bids unopened to bidders. Bidders may not modify or withdraw their bids unless the RD receives a written modification or written withdrawal request prior to 10 a.m., Tuesday, March 18, 2003. Should an unexpected event such as flooding or travel restrictions be significantly disruptive to bid submission, the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region may extend the Bid Submission Deadline. Bidders may call (504) 736-0557 for information about the possible extension of the Bid Submission Deadline due to such an event.

Areas Offered for Leasing: The MMS is offering for leasing all blocks and partial blocks listed in the document "Blocks Available for Leasing in Central Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sale 185" included in the FNOS 185. All of these blocks are shown on the following Leasing Maps and Official Protraction Diagrams (which may be purchased from the MMS Gulf of Mexico Region Public Information Unit):