

the annual Land and Water Conservation Fund apportionment to states by supporting projects for disadvantaged populations in urban areas.

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Pending Departmental advisement, FWS plans to announce nearly \$15 million in grants to 40 states for projects to support recreational boating through the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) program. More than \$9 million of this will go to six states (California, Maine, Michigan, South Carolina, Texas and Washington) for competitive grants, and the remaining \$5 million will go to 39 states, commonwealths, territories and the District of Columbia for a smaller, non-competitive grant program. Funding is generated through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund by excise taxes on sport fishing and boating equipment and tackle, motorboat fuels and import duties on fishing tackle, yachts and pleasure craft. Grants, which are matched by funding from project partners, support construction or renovation of tie-ups, utilities, fuel stations, pump-out and dump stations, restrooms and additional sanitary amenities such as laundry and showers for recreational boaters.

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30-60 Day Look Ahead

FWS is currently in discussions with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) regarding access to water from a FWS-owned well on the Buenos Aires NWR for a Baboquivari Road Repair Project scheduled to begin in January 2018. Part of the project will require the transportation of water from the refuge to the Sasabe Forward Operating Base (FOB) to sustain approximately 60 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) members, who will reside at the FOB throughout the construction phase of the project. CBP plans to inspect the FWS-owned well and upgrade/replace pump and water delivery components to facilitate optimum functionality during the project's period of performance. This will ensure both the CBP national security mission and FWS objectives are met.

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several national media outlets. There are 727 personnel assigned to the incident along with significant aerial support (five fixed wing air tanker, and 11 helicopters), 79 wildland fire engines, nine bulldozers, 47 tractor plows, three 20-person hot shot crews, and various overhead and support positions. Models predict this fire will last for several months and will burn 300,000 acres. If the fire crosses north of the Suwanee Canal, the amount of potential acres to burn could double.

WEEKLY REPORT
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
May 17, 2017

Week Ahead Schedule of Meetings, Hearings, and Travel

Acting FWS Director Jim Kurth will be in the office all week.

Hot Topics

In May, FWS along with southern Arizona's Pima and Pinal counties, and Arizona Game and Fish Department will begin to use federally endangered Gila topminnows to target mosquito larvae and reduce the threat of mosquito-borne diseases, such as the West Nile and Zika viruses. The counties will establish holding facilities from where Gila topminnows can be stocked. The fish will then be placed into abandoned urban sources of water, such as swimming pools, fountains and backyard ponds found at vacant and abandoned houses and commercial properties within the counties. The Gila topminnows will replace the use of exotic Western mosquitofish as a previously preferred vector control agent. Research over the past 20 years shows that native topminnows are just as effective at targeting disease-causing mosquitoes as non-native mosquitofish, without any of the unintended consequences if they escape confinement. Use of topminnows for vector control is an element of the award-winning Pima County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan and permitted under a state-wide programmatic Safe Harbor Agreement. Joint outreach is planned.

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Asian Carp

In June, FWS plans to send the 2016 Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) report to Congress. WRRDA includes direction from Congress to FWS to lead a multiagency effort to slow the spread of Asian carp in the Upper Mississippi River and Ohio River basins, in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey. Specifically, WRRDA calls for FWS to develop and deliver a report to Congress summarizing all activities and expenditures (both federal and non-federal) related to Asian carp prevention efforts in the two watersheds, as well as describing any observed changes in the range of Asian carp in Upper Mississippi River and Ohio River basins. Notable changes from the 2015 report include updates on a slight range expansion of silver carp, the movement of juvenile Asian carps in the sub-basins and additional information on the status of black carp. As in previous years, the 2016 report will be made available to the public on AsianCarp.us. The report also outlines research that could improve the ability to control the spread of Asian carp and quantitative measures proposed for use in documenting progress in controlling the spread of Asian carp. Potentially controversial due to the slight range expansion of silver carp. No public outreach is planned; outreach to Congress will be conducted.

Endangered Species Act Recovery Actions

Once cleared, FWS will send to the *Federal Register* a Notice of Availability for the second revised draft recovery plan for the giant garter snake. Target to the *Federal Register* is late May. The high estimated costs associated with this plan might garner some public attention, but recovery plans are non-regulatory and estimated costs represent voluntary actions by diverse public and private partners.

On June 7, FWS plans to formally recognize Fort Hood as the recipient of FWS’s Military Conservation Partner Award. FWS presents this award annually to a military installation whose efforts represent significant conservation accomplishments achieved in partnership with FWS and other conservation agencies. The U.S. Army Garrison Fort Hood Military Installation encompasses 218,824 acres in Bell and Coryell counties in Texas. Fort Hood is one of the Army’s premier installations, encompassing the largest area of any installation in the continental United States. It conducts the full range of mission-related training activities and also manages the largest known populations of the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. Outreach is planned. The ceremony is open to media.

In late June, FWS will publish a notice of intent to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement and initiate scoping related to the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan. In July, following publication of this notice, the Service will host four public scoping meetings in central Oregon to gather information for the NEPA analysis. The Deschutes Basin Board of Control and the city of Prineville are developing the plan to mitigate for the incidental take of three listed species – Oregon spotted frog, bull trout, and steelhead – resulting from operations of eight

central Oregon irrigation districts. Media expected. While there are controversial issues with development of the habitat conservation plan, the notice and initiation of scoping is not expected to be controversial in itself.

Endangered Species Act Listing/Delisting Actions

In late May, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a notice that it is reopening the comment period and plans to hold two public hearings on the proposed listing for the Texas hornshell, a mussel located in New Mexico, Texas and Mexico. Outreach is planned.

In late May, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a final determination on the bureau's March 11, 2016, proposal to identify the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) grizzly bear population of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming as a distinct population segment (DPS) and revise the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife by removing grizzly bears within the GYE DPS due to recovery. Outreach is planned.

On May 26, FWS expects to publish a notice announcing consideration of a draft Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA), draft Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), and draft environmental assessment for the Texas hornshell (proposed for listing) and other covered species (Rio Grande River cooter, gray redbreast, blue sucker and Pecos springsnail), and an enhancement of survival permit application under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) submitted by the Center of Excellence. The covered area would include portions of Eddy County, New Mexico, and Culberson County, Texas.

In early June, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a final rule to remove the Hualapai Mexican vole, located in Arizona, from the list of endangered and threatened species due to the fact that the original taxonomic classification is no longer appropriate. Outreach is planned.

In early June, FWS will send to the *Federal Register* a notice extending the final listing determination and critical habitat for the San Fernando Valley spineflower, in California. Outreach is planned.

In mid-June, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a 12-month finding on a petition to list the San Felipe gambusia, a Texas fish. Outreach is planned.

In late June, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a 12-month finding and proposed delisting determination on the Deseret milkvetch, found in Utah. Outreach is planned.

In late June, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* 12-month findings on petitions to list Kirtland's snake and the Mohave shoulderband snail. FWS is required by settlement agreement to submit the finding for the Mohave shoulderband snail to the *Federal Register* by June 30 and the finding for Kirtland's snake to the *Federal Register* by September 30. Outreach is planned.

FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a notice to reopen the comment period on proposed rules to list and designate critical habitat for the Guadalupe fescue, downlist the Tobusch fishhook cactus from endangered to threatened, downlist the Kuenzler hedgehog cactus from endangered to threatened, and delist gypsum wild-buckwheat. Stakeholder outreach is planned.

The package is pending clearance by the Department.

In early July, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* a final listing determination for the i'iwi, a Hawaiian bird. FWS is required by settlement agreement to submit the finding for the i'iwi to the *Federal Register* by September 20. Outreach is planned. Pending clearance by the Department.

National Wildlife Refuge Actions

During the week of May 22, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia will announce final changes to the refuge's fee structure, to align with fees already in place at the adjacent NPS Assateague Island National Seashore. The new fee structure, which eliminates the daily pass, increases the weekly pass from \$15 to \$20, and increases the annual pass from \$30 to \$40, was proposed in March and open for 30 days of public comment.

In May, FWS anticipates making a draft Environmental Assessment for the Valle de Oro NWR in Albuquerque, New Mexico, available for public comment. The nearby Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB) has concerns about potential bird strikes on aircraft whose flight paths cross over the refuge. Of primary concern are proposed habitat restoration plans for seasonal wetlands. KAFB believes restored habitat may attract more large birds (geese, cranes, and ducks) and increase collision risks. FWS is meeting with KAFB and intends to continue coordinating with the Federal Aviation Administration and KAFB throughout this process to minimize these concerns. This issue is of interest to Senator Heinrich (D-NM) and Rep Michelle Lujan-Grisham (D-NM) and potentially to Senator Udall (D-NM).

In late May or early June, FWS will publish a proposed rule and open a 30-day public comment period on the 2017-18 Refuge-Specific Hunting and Sport Fishing Regulations. The proposed rule would open various national wildlife refuges to hunting and/or sport fishing for the first time (new hunts) and expand hunting and fishing opportunities at others. The proposal also includes modifications to existing hunting and fishing regulations for refuges and wetland management districts. Outreach is planned.

FWS is initiating a planning process to develop a water management plan and associated environmental assessment for Pocosin Lakes NWR in North Carolina. Congressional representatives including Senator Tillis (R-NC) are interested in seeing the development of a water management plan for the refuge with public involvement. The plan will guide water management on the refuge for the next 15 or more years. The planning process will include several opportunities for public involvement, beginning with public scoping meetings to be hosted in June. Outreach is planned.

Migratory Bird Management Actions

In late May, FWS plans to publish in the *Federal Register* the final 2017-18 hunting regulations for certain migratory game birds. FWS annually prescribes frameworks, or outer limits, for dates and times when hunting may occur and the number of birds that may be taken and possessed in hunting seasons. These frameworks are necessary to allow state selections of seasons and limits

and to allow recreational harvest at levels compatible with population and habitat conditions. There are no substantive changes between the proposed regulations and the final. If-asked talking points will be available.

On May 22, FWS Regional Director Tom Melius will represent the FWS in the signing of an Urban Bird Treaty with the City of Detroit. Partners who will be working with FWS on an ensuing urban bird agenda include the City of Detroit, Michigan DNR, the Detroit Zoo and Detroit Audubon. Detroit becomes the 29th Urban Bird Treaty city, and provides important stopover habitat as well as being the intersection of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways along the Detroit River, resulting in over 350 species of birds using the corridor for migration. More than 300,000 diving ducks of various species use the Detroit River as stopover habitat – a theme also highlighted for International Migratory Bird Day. Staff members from U.S. Representatives John Conyers (D-MI) and Brenda Lawrence (D-MI) are expected to attend the event. Outreach is planned.

Within the next 30-60 days, FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* its annual proposal for administering tribal hunting, fishing, and gathering rights under multiple treaties for several federally recognized tribes in the Great Lakes region. The proposal has been compiled in consultation with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, which represents 11 tribes in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. FWS has informed the Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan DNRs of the agency's support for these proposed regulations. A final decision will not be made until after public comments are reviewed and would not take effect until the fall 2017 hunting season. The proposal is expected to be controversial due to the inclusion of several new techniques for tribal members to take waterfowl. No outreach is planned.

In May, through the Department, FWS will announce the approval of around \$4 million in grants for 32 projects throughout the Americas as part of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grant program. Exact date and award amount are not yet determined. Outreach through the Department is planned.

Dam Removal

In May, FWS will begin work on the Bradford Dam removal project, located on the border of Westerly and Hopkinton, Rhode Island. Following construction of a bypass channel, in-river work to remove the dam will start in July. The project is supported by federal funding for Hurricane Sandy recovery. The work will restore fish passage and natural river flow to 31 miles of the Pawcatuck River and protect local communities from risks of flooding and dam failure. Outreach is planned.

Energy

FWS has completed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the R-Project Transmission Line, a 225-mile long, 345 kilovolt transmission line that runs cross county through the Nebraska Sandhills. The R-Project will be constructed and operated by Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD); NPPD is applying for an incidental take permit for the American burying beetle and has developed the associated habitat conservation plan. The Notice of

Availability was published on May 12. Public meetings are scheduled for the week of June 12 in Sutherland, Thedford, and Burwell, Nebraska.

Other

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FWS plans to send to the *Federal Register* draft population assessment reports for the Southern Beaufort Sea and Chukchi-Bering seas populations of polar bear in Alaska and open a 90-day public comment period. Pending clearance by the Department. No outreach is planned.

On May 31, FWS will join agencies in Canada, other U.S. federal agencies, Canadian federal agencies, First Nations in Canada, and two federally recognized tribes in the U.S. (the Houlton Band of Maliseets and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs) at an event in Edmundston, Quebec, to sign the St. John Watershed Collaboration Agreement. The non-binding agreement affirms the relationship between these governments to restore sea-run fish species such as shad and herring through fish passage, habitat restoration, and other ecosystem restoration efforts. No outreach is planned.

By the end of May, FWS will transmit a report to Congress required by the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act, which describes the collaborative process to establish a non-regulatory program to conserve this important watershed. Outreach is planned.

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