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**U P D A T E**

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**April 15, 2005**

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**[SPECIAL REPORT: ESA FIELD HEARING ANNOUNCED](#)**

The House Resources Committee has announced its first hearing this Congress on updating and improving the ESA. The field hearing will be held on **Saturday, April 30, 2005 in Jackson, Mississippi** and will focus on lessons learned protecting and restoring endangered species in the Southern United States. While ESA issues are often associated with the West, the hearing will highlight the significant numbers of species that are listed in many Southern states. The hearing will begin at 9:00 a.m. and will be held at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, 2148 Riverside Drive. A rally prior to the hearing to gather supporters of ESA improvements is scheduled to begin at 8:15 a.m. Saturday morning in front of the museum.

The Committee has asked for written statements for the hearing record in support of efforts to update and improve the ESA. We will be submitting a statement on behalf of the Coalition, and encourage all members to submit individual statements as well. Written statements for the hearing record may be sent to Kristin Schrader of the House Resources Committee at [kristin.schrader@mail.house.gov](mailto:kristin.schrader@mail.house.gov). Please also send copies of all statements to Jordan Smith at [jas@vnf.com](mailto:jas@vnf.com) for NESARC's archives.

**A strong turnout for this event is essential for its success.** If you or a representative of your organization is planning to attend, or if you are aware of supporters in or around Mississippi that may be interested in receiving additional information about the hearing, please contact Jordan Smith at [jas@vnf.com](mailto:jas@vnf.com) or (202) 298-1914.

**IN OTHER NEWS...**

**White House announces conference on cooperative conservation.** The White House announced last week that it will hold a conference on cooperative conservation in St. Louis, Missouri from August 29-31, 2005 to consider the President's cooperative conservation vision defined in his August 2004 Executive Order. The conference seeks to (1) broaden cooperative conservation with state, tribal and local governments, communities, private for profit and non-profit organizations, and private citizens; (2) enhance and integrate public and private land stewardship; (3) bring together interested participants and decision makers who can advance cooperative conservation; (4) identify ideas for future conservation and environmental policies and initiatives; (5) facilitate the exchange of information and advice for successful partnerships; and (6) institutionalize cooperative conservation to enhance on-the-ground conservation results and progress. Invitations to participate have been distributed to a broad cross-section of private individuals. Additional information on the conference may be found at <http://www.conservation.ceq.gov/about.html>

**Critical habitat designated for several Southern California species.** Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) officials recently made critical habitat designations for three federally protected species in Southern California. FWS determined that no critical habitat would be designated for the *Lane Mountain milk-vetch*. The endangered *Riverside fairy shrimp* will have 306 acres of vernal pools designated as critical habitat, a decrease from the 5,795 acres proposed last April. The *arroyo toad* will have nearly 11,700 acres designated, reduced from the 140,000 acres the Agency proposed. Several factors played into the final critical habitat designations, including exemptions that were included in the fiscal year 2004 Defense Department appropriations bill allowing the exclusion of military lands from critical habitat designations when national security is called into question, economic costs that prove greater than the benefits of protecting the land, and findings that some areas included in the proposed designation were not quality habitat. FWS officials noted that, even without the critical habitat designation, the military will have to consult with the Agency to ensure its actions will not harm the federally protected species. According to FWS, the consultation requirement is one of the reasons that, throughout its 30 years of implementing ESA, it has found little to no additional species protection value resulting from the designation of critical habitat.

**Deadline to comment on *Preble's* delisting approaches.** As we reported several months ago, a proposed rule was published in February 2005 to delist the *Preble's meadow jumping mouse*. The delisting results from research that indicates the mouse is genetically no different than a more common meadow mouse. The proposed delisting of the mouse supports the need for updates and improvements to the Act so that a decision-making process may be implemented that allows for full public participation, better data collection, and independent scientific review to support decisions made on listings, critical habitat designations and recovery efforts. The governors of Colorado and Wyoming, along with farmers, developers and others, support the delisting based on a study completed in 2003 by Rob Roy Ramey at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Comments on the proposed rule are due by May 3, 2005. To view the proposed rule in the Federal Register, visit <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/pdf/05-2020.pdf>

**Task Force created to improve the National Environmental Policy Act.** House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-CA) announced the formation of a Task Force on Improving the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Rep. Cathy McMorris (R-WA) has been appointed to lead the Task Force, which will travel around the country to hold meetings on the current state of the environmental law. NEPA was signed into law in 1970 and has never been thoroughly reviewed by any Congressional body. The Task Force will seek input from the people who deal with NEPA on a day-to-day basis to determine whether the original intent of the law is being fulfilled. The first Task Force hearing has been scheduled for April 23, 2005 in Spokane, WA and will address the role of NEPA in the States of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

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