Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Reopening of the Comment Period on the Proposed Delisting of the Douglas County Population of the Columbian White-Tailed Deer

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule; notice of reopening of comment period.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), provide notice of the reopening of the comment period for the proposed delisting of the Douglas County, Oregon population of the Columbian white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus leucurus). The comment period has been reopened in order to conduct a peer review of the proposed rule.

DATES: Comments from all interested parties must be received by November 18, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Written comments, data, and reports concerning this proposal should be sent to the Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southwest Region Field Office, 2900 NW Stewart Parkway, Roseburg, Oregon 97470. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours, at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: David Peterson, at the address listed above (telephone 541/957-3474; facsimile 541/957-3475).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Columbian white-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus leucurus) resembles other white-tailed deer subspecies, ranging in size from 39 to 45 kilograms (kg) (85 to 100 pounds (lbs)) for females and 52 to 68 kg (115 to 150 lbs) for males. Generally a red-brown color in summer, and gray in winter, the species has white rings around the eyes and a white ring just behind the nose. Its tail is long and triangular in shape, and is brown on the dorsal (upper) surface, fringed in white, and the ventral (under) portion is white (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) 1995). The species was formerly distributed throughout the bottomlands and prairie woodlands of the lower Columbia, Willamette, and Umpqua River basins in Oregon and southern Washington (Bailey 1936). It is the westernmost representative of the 38 subspecies of white-tailed deer. Early accounts suggested this deer was locally common, particularly in riparian areas along the major rivers (Gavin 1978). The decline in deer numbers was rapid with the arrival and settlement of pioneers in the fertile river valleys. Conversion of brushy riparian land to agriculture, urbanization, uncontrolled sport and commercial hunting, and perhaps other factors apparently caused the extirpation of this deer over most of its range by the early 1900s (Gavin 1984). Only a small herd of 200 to 400 animals in the lower Columbia River area of Clatsop and Columbia counties, Oregon, and Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, Washington, and a disjunct population of unknown size in Douglas County, Oregon, survived. These two remnant populations are geographically separated by about 320 kilometers (km) (200 miles (mi)) of unsuitable or discontinuous habitat.

Population declines led to classification of this subspecies as endangered in 1967 under the Endangered Species Protection Act of 1966 (32 FR 4001). The subspecies was automatically included in the lists of threatened and endangered species when the Endangered Species Act was authorized in 1973 (16 U.S. C. 1531 et seq.). Prior to 1977, only the Columbia River population was listed as endangered since the Douglas County population was considered a black-tailed deer (Odocoileus hemionus columbiana) or a hybrid between the black-tailed deer and the Columbian white-tailed deer by the State of Oregon. In 1978, the State of Oregon recognized the white-tailed deer population in Douglas County as the Columbian white-tailed deer and prohibited hunting of white-tailed deer in that county (ODFW 1995). The Columbian White-tailed Deer Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan) was approved by us in 1983 (Service 1983). Because of the positive trend between the Douglas County and Columbia River populations, and differences in habitats and threats, the Recovery Plan addresses the recovery of these two populations separately.

Crews (1939) estimated the population in the 1930s in Douglas County at 200 to 300 individuals within a range of about 78 square kilometers (sq km) (30 square miles (sq mi)). In 1970, ODFW estimated that 450 to 500 deer were present. By 1983, the number had increased to about 2,500 (Smith 1985). The population has continued to grow, and are presently estimated to be between 5,900 to 7,900 deer (ODFW 1999).

Along with this increase in numbers, the range also has expanded. The deer have expanded to the north and west in the last 10 years, and now occupy an area of approximately 800 sq km (308 sq mi) (ODFW 1995).

Most habitat for the Douglas County population is on private lands. Approximately 3,880 hectares (ha) (9,586 acres (ac)) of suitable habitat are presently considered secure on Federal, County and private lands. For the purpose of delisting, habitat is considered secure if it is protected by legally binding measures or law from adverse human activities for the foreseeable future.

The current total population size is estimated as approximately six times the population size required for downlisting, which greatly reduces the risk to the population. It is also anticipated that as habitat management and restoration activities are implemented by the Bureau of Land Management, which contains the majority of secure lands, the carrying capacity and numbers of deer on these lands will increase accordingly. The Douglas County population has met the objectives in the Recovery Plan, and greatly exceeded the habitat objectives.

We published a proposed rule to delist the Douglas County population of the Columbian white-tailed deer on May 11, 1999 (64 FR 25263). The original comment period closed on June 25, 1999. We will conduct a peer review of this proposal and solicit the opinions of three appropriate and independent specialists regarding the data, assumptions, and supportive information presented for the Columbian white-tailed deer, per our Interagency Cooperative Policy for Peer Review in Endangered Species Act Activities (59 FR 34270).

References Cited


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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679
[I.D. 102599G]

Groundfish Fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area

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

ACTION: Notification of draft alternatives; extension of scoping and comment period.

SUMMARY: NMFS is publishing draft alternatives to be analyzed in a programmatic supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on Federal groundfish fishery management in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska. This document also provides an extension of the scoping period from November 15 until December 15, 1999.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before December 15, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Lori Gravel, Sustainable Fisheries Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802. Comments may also be hand delivered to Room 457-1, Federal Office Building, 907 West 9 Street, Juneau, AK.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven Davis, NMFS, (907) 271-3523 or steven.k.davis@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS published in the Federal Register, a notice of intent to prepare an SEIS on Federal groundfish fishery management in the EEZ off Alaska and announced scoping meetings (64 FR 53305, October 1, 1999). The reason for undertaking the analysis, and the issues to be analyzed, are detailed in the notice of intent and are not repeated here. In the notice, NMFS indicated that, prior to the scoping meetings, NMFS will publish in the Federal Register draft alternatives to be developed further during the scoping process.

NMFS manages the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries to achieve the goals and objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for the Groundfish Fisheries in the BSAI Area, and the Groundfish of the GOA. The goals and objectives reflect the complicated array of often competing concerns that affect the Alaska groundfish fisheries. In some instances, contradictory objectives are articulated within a single goal. For example, paraphrasing from the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the FMPs, we find they generally contain the following goals and objectives: Achieve continuing availability of food supply and recreational opportunities; minimize irreversible adverse effects on fishery resources and the marine environment, including essential fish habitat; maximize economic benefits to the Nation and to the states; provide for sustained participation of fishing communities; minimize waste, reduce bycatch and the mortality of bycatch, encourage development of underused fisheries; control effort; promote equitable allocations; keep management options open for the future; prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks; manage stocks as a unit; promote protection of the safety of human life at sea; promote regulatory and fishing efficiency; use the best available data; account for all fishery related removals. In deciding on particular new management measures, NMFS and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council review reasonable alternatives for achieving one or more of those goals and objectives, then base decisions according to the views of competing interests and concerns.

With this programmatic environmental impact analysis, NMFS will evaluate how successfully the current management regime achieves those goals and objectives. The SEIS will support these determinations by presenting an analysis of the environmental impacts of the current regime and compare them to configurations of alternatives management measures that would also achieve those goals and objectives.

Alternatives

NMFS has chosen to analyze broad thematic alternatives that will provide, in a programmatic sense, a conceptual framework for understanding how effectively a new harvest management regime achieves the articulated goals and objectives and what their environmental impacts would be. The SEIS will look at the themes: (1) Who harvests groundfish? (2) what groundfish is harvested? (3) when and where is groundfish harvested; and (4) how groundfish is harvested. Sub-alternatives will be developed for each theme. The alternatives and sub-alternatives NMFS is currently considering include the following:

Allocative Schemes (Who harvests groundfish?)

Sub-alternative 1 - Status quo: Allocation of groundfish harvest is currently based on the species or species group and is made to individuals, cooperatives, and Olympic-style fisheries (i.e., non-Community Development Quota (CDQ), non-Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fisheries) by sector.

Sub-alternative 2 - IFQ: Expand or reduce allocations to individuals by species or species group.

Sub-alternative 3 - Cooperatives: Expand or reduce allocations to cooperatives by species or species group.

Sub-alternative 4 - Open access: Reduce or remove limited access systems.