EA process, this issue has not yet been addressed by a management objective).

• What would be the effect of any decrease in flight-level restrictions?

• What buffer zones are needed to assure public safety for critical training?

• What changes to ground instrumentation are being proposed?

The Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990 includes a special provision for continued military operations at Cabeza Prieta NWR. The potential impacts from military activities include the following: visual and noise disturbance, disturbance to wildlife behavior, aircraft collisions with wildlife, and impacts caused by live fire and military debris.

• How can the refuge reduce impacts caused by authorized military operations (tow dart and other debris removal, accident response protocol, entry without permit, expansion of low level flights)?

The environmental review of this project will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), NEPA Regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), other appropriate Federal laws and regulations, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and Service policies and procedures for compliance with those regulations. This notice is being furnished in accordance with Section 1501.7 of the National Environmental Policy Act, to obtain suggestions and information from other agencies, tribes, and the public on the scope of issues to be addressed in the plan and EIS. Comments and participation in this scoping process are solicited.

We estimate that the draft CCP/Environmental Impact Statement will be available to the public in the winter of 2000.

Dated: April 3, 2000.

Geoffrey L. Haskett,

Acting Regional Director, Region 2, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

[FR Doc. 00–9048 Filed 4–13–00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–55–U

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Draft Environmental Impact Statement; Notice of Availability

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that a draft environmental impact statement (Draft EIS) for the comprehensive conservation plan and boundary revision for the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex located in Churchill and Washoe Counties, Nevada will be available for public review beginning April 14, 2000. Stillwater NWR Complex includes Stillwater NWR, Stillwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Fallon NWR, and Anaho Island NWR. Comments and suggestions are invited. All comments, including names and addresses will become part of the administrative record and may be released.

DATES: The comment period for this Draft EIS will extend from April 14, 2000 to June 12, 2000. Comments received will be considered during preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Open house meetings will be held on April 26 and 27, 2000 (see below for details on locations).

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to: Kim Hanson, Refuge Manager, Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 1236, Fallon, Nevada 89407, (775) 423–5128. The open-house schedule is: April 26, 2000, from 3:00 to 7:30 p.m. at the Fallon Convention Center, 100 Campus Way, Fallon, Nevada and April 27, 2000, from 3:00 to 7:30 p.m. at the Department of the Interior Building, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Reno, Nevada.

Copies of the Draft EIS may be inspected at the following locations: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Planning, Eastside Federal Complex, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232–4181; Stillwater NWR Complex, 1000 Auction Road, Fallon, NV 89406; Churchill County Library, 553 South Main Street, Fallon, NV 89406; Carson City Library, 900 North Roop Street, Carson City, NV 89701; Downtown Reno Library, 301 S. Center Street, Reno, NV 89501. Individuals wishing to receive a copy of the Draft EIS or Summary for review should immediately contact the Stillwater NWR office (address and phone number provided above). The Summary document can be viewed on the Service's regional web site: www:r1/fws/gov/planning/plnhome.html/.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kim Hanson, Stillwater NWR Complex (775–423–5128) or Don DeLong, CA/NV Refuge Planning Office (916–414–6500).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Stillwater NWR Complex currently includes Stillwater NWR, Stillwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Fallon NWR, which are located in west-central Nevada, about six miles northeast of Fallon, Churchill County, and Anaho Island NWR, located about 30 miles northeast of Reno, Nevada, in Washoe County. Stillwater NWR is about 79,570 acres of Federal land, Stillwater WMA about 65,603 acres, and Fallon NWR about 17,848 acres, for a combined total of 163,021 acres of Federal land. Non-Federal inholdings within the approved boundaries are about 59,708 acres. Anaho Island NWR encompasses the entire island, which has fluctuated in size from 220 to 745 acres in recent history due to the fluctuating water levels of Pyramid Lake. In July 1997, it was an estimated 575 acres.

Anaho Island NWR was established in 1913 by Executive Order 1819 as a ''* * * preserve and breeding ground for native birds.'' Public Law 101–618 (§ 210(b)(2)) more narrowly defined the purpose of Anaho Island NWR, stating that it was to be managed and administered ''* * * for the benefit and protection of colonial-nesting species and other migratory birds.'' The Public Law also recognized that Anaho Island NWR is part of the Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation, but it is to be managed and administered by the Service as a component of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

Fallon NWR was established in 1931 by Executive Order 5606 ''as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wild animals.'' It is located at the terminus of the Carson River and encompasses the delta wetlands of the river.

Stillwater WMA and Stillwater NWR were established through a 50-year agreement (Tripartite Agreement) signed in 1948 by the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District (TCID), Nevada State Board of Fish and Game Commissioners (Nevada Division of Wildlife), and the Service. Although the Tripartite Agreement expired on November 26, 1998, the Service continues to cooperatively manage the Stillwater WMA with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation under most provisions of the Tripartite Agreement. Stillwater WMA, comprised mainly of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation withdrawn public lands, was established in 1948 for the purposes of conserving and managing wildlife and their habitat, and for public hunting. Stillwater NWR was established in 1949 as a wildlife sanctuary (closed to hunting) adjacent to the public hunting area.

In 1990, the approved boundary of Stillwater NWR was expanded, under subsection 206(b)(1) of the Truckee-Carson-Pyramid Lake Water Rights Settlement Act (Title II of Pub. L. 101–618), to encompass Stillwater Marsh, most of which was previously in the Stillwater WMA. In addition to the boundary expansion, Public Law 101–618 also outlined four purposes for which the Service must manage

Stillwater NWR: (1) maintaining and restoring natural biological diversity within the refuge; (2) providing for the conservation and management of fish and wildlife and their habitats within the refuge; (3) fulfilling international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife; and (4) providing opportunities for scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation.

Each alternative in the Draft EIS consists of two main parts: (1) a boundary revision for Stillwater NWR, and (2) the framework of a comprehensive conservation plan, including refuge goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving the purposes for which each refuge was established and for contributing toward the mission of the Refuge System.

Boundary Revision

Public Law 101–618 authorized the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to recommend to Congress boundary revisions to Stillwater NWR that may be appropriate to carry out the purposes of the refuge and to facilitate the protection and enhancement of Lahontan Valley wetland habitat. The law authorized the Secretary to recommend the transfer of any Bureau of Reclamation withdrawn public lands within the existing wildlife use areas in the Lahontan Valley to the Service for addition to the Refuge System. Furthermore it authorized the identification of lands in the Lahontan Valley currently under the jurisdiction of the Service that no longer warrant continued status as units of the Refuge System.

Comprehensive Conservation Plan

A comprehensive conservation plan is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 6688dd *et seq.*), as amended. The purpose of developing a comprehensive conservation plan for the Stillwater NWR Complex is to provide managers with a 15-year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife conservation and legal mandates. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitat, the comprehensive conservation plan will highlight wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, environmental education, and wildlife observation and photography.

Draft EIS Issues and Alternatives Being Considered

Six major issues were identified through scoping. They are (1) potential effects on populations of fish, wildlife, and plants, (2) potential effects on habitat and ecosystem functioning, (3) potential effects on recreational, educational, and interpretive opportunities, (4) potential effects on the local agriculture and socio-economy, and the Newlands irrigation project, (5) potential effects on cultural resources, and (6) potential effects on Naval Air Station-Fallon operations.

The Draft EIS identifies and provides an evaluation of four alternative boundaries for Stillwater NWR and management approaches for managing the Stillwater NWR Complex for the next 15 years. The four alternatives considered in detail in the Draft EIS are as follows. Alternative A (No Action Alternative) would retain the existing boundaries and entails baseline management as outlined in the 1987 Management Plan for Stillwater WMA and modified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service's) water-rights acquisition program. Water rights acquired for refuge wetlands would continue to be delivered to the refuge according to the traditional agricultural seasonal-pattern of delivery in the irrigation district. Habitat management would emphasize breeding habitat for waterfowl and other waterbirds and would also provide for the needs of migrating and wintering waterfowl; livestock grazing and muskrat trapping would be managed commensurate with wildlife objectives on a large part of the area; and hunting remain the priority public use and would continue to be a coequal purpose with wildlife conservation.

Alternative B would result in the lands within Stillwater WMA reverting back to U.S. Bureau of Reclamation or public land status, thus reducing the amount of Federal land managed primarily for wildlife conservation in the Lahontan Valley. This alternative would focus on providing fall and winter habitat for waterfowl on Stillwater NWR (and would emphasize fall deliveries of acquired water rights), but would also provide habitat for breeding waterbirds. Livestock grazing and muskrat trapping would only be used as a habitat management tool. Opportunities for waterfowl hunting on Stillwater NWR would continue to be emphasized, although opportunities for wildlife viewing and environmental education would be expanded. Providing breeding habitat for waterbirds would be emphasized on Fallon NWR.

Under Alternative C (Service's Preferred Alternative), Stillwater NWR would be expanded to include most of Stillwater WMA and Fallon NWR and to include additional riparian and dune habitat, although the overall amount of Federal land managed for wildlife conservation in the Lahontan Valley would decline. This alternative would emphasize the approximation of natural biological diversity, including breeding habitat for waterbirds. The natural seasonal pattern of water inflow would be approximated, with adjustments to minimize nest flooding and to enhance fall and winter habitat for waterfowl. Livestock grazing would have limited application in the habitat management program, and muskrat trapping would primarily be undertaken to prevent damage to water-control structures. Waterfowl hunting would continue to be an integral part of the public use program under Alternative C, but environmental education and wildlife observation would receive considerably greater emphasis.

Alternative D would expand the boundary of Stillwater NWR to include all of Stillwater WMA and Fallon NWR and additional riparian and dune habitat. This alternative would focus on restoring natural hydrologic patterns and other ecological processes. Protection and restoration of riparian habitat would receive enhanced emphasis, and livestock grazing and muskrat trapping would not be used in the habitat management program and would be prohibited. Public use management would focus on providing opportunities for wildlife observation and environmental education, and hunting opportunities would diminish.

Maps of each alternative boundary and public use zones are provided in the Draft EIS and summary document. In all alternatives, Anaho Island NWR would be managed much as it has in the past, with a continued emphasis on protecting the nesting colony of American white pelicans and other colony-nesting birds that use the island.

Other governmental agencies, tribes, and members of the general public contributed to the planning and evaluation of the Draft EIS. The Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the **Federal Register** on March 14, 1997 (62 FR 12245) by the Department of the Interior. The Service has given presentations to county officials, conservation groups, other interested parties and the media, and informed the public through intermittent distribution of planning updates. Copies of the Draft EIS or a

Summary have been sent to all agencies and individuals who participated in the scoping process and to all others who have already requested copies.

Dated: April 6, 2000.

Elizabeth H. Stevens,

Acting CA/NV Operations Manager.

[FR Doc. 00–9047 Filed 4–13–00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–55–P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Migratory Bird Permits; Environmental Impact Statement on Double-Crested Cormorant Management

AGENCY: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meetings.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or we) invites public participation in the scoping process for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the management of the double-crested cormorant in the United States. We are preparing this EIS under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The EIS will consider a range of management alternatives to address population expansion of the double-crested cormorant. This notice describes issues of concern and possible management alternatives; invites further public participation in the scoping process; identifies the locations, dates, and times of public scoping meetings; and identifies the Service official to whom comments may be directed.

DATES: Written comments regarding EIS scoping should be submitted by June 16, 2000, to the address below. Dates and times for the ten public scoping hearings are listed in the table under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the proposed EIS and management plan can be sent by the following two methods:

(1) by mail to Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 634, Arlington, VA 22203; or

(2) by email to *cormorant__eis@fws.gov.*

The public may inspect comments during normal business hours in Room 634, Arlington Square Building, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA. The scoping hearings will be held at the locations listed in the table under **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jon Andrew, Office of Migratory Bird Management, (703) 358–1714.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 8, 1999, we published a notice of intent (64 FR 60826) to prepare an EIS and accompanying national management plan to address impacts caused by population and range expansion of the double-crested cormorant in the contiguous United States. This action is in response to increasing reports of resource conflicts between humans and cormorants. In addition to encouraging public input, we are involving natural resource agencies with jurisdiction or expertise in this issue, including U.S. Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/Wildlife Services, a cooperating agency in the development of the EIS, and concerned State agencies, especially those of Michigan, Vermont, Minnesota, Texas, and New York, who will participate through the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Double-Crested Cormorant Populations

The double-crested cormorant (Phalacrocorax auritus), a species native to the 48 contiguous United States and Alaska, has been federally protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act since 1972. This protected status, in addition to decreased levels of organochlorine contaminants in the environment and increased food availability, has contributed to dramatic population increases of this large, fish-eating waterbird over the past two-and-a-half decades.

The size of the North American breeding population has been estimated at about 372,000 pairs, or 852 colonies (Tyson *et al.* 1997). Hatch (1995) estimated a total population of 1 million-2 million birds. The double-crested cormorant breeds widely throughout much of the coastal and interior portions of the United States. It has been found breeding in 46 of the 48 contiguous United States. However, it is not uniformly distributed across this broad area. Greater than 60 percent of the breeding birds belong to the Interior Population. This is the fastest growing of the six major North American breeding populations (Hatch 1995), which includes the Great Lakes basin and northern prairie States and provinces. From 1970–1991, in the American and Canadian Great Lakes region, the number of double-crested cormorant nests increased from 89 to 38,000, an average growth rate of 29 percent (Weseloh *et al.* 1995). The contiguous United States breeding population increased at an average rate of 6.1 percent per year from 1966–1994 (Sauer *et al.* 1996).

In many parts of the United States, increased cormorant populations have led to conflicts with humans and various natural resources. Such conflicts include concerns over impacts to local economies, human health, the aquacultural industry, vegetation, fish populations, and bird populations. Management actions that we presently permit include population monitoring and research; information and education efforts; harassment; fitting of exclusionary devices at aquacultural facilities; issuance of depredation permits to take cormorants, their nests, or their eggs; and a Depredation Order (63 FR 10560) for taking birds at aquacultural facilities in 13 States. The preparation of an EIS is necessary in order to analyze alternative management strategies in the development of a national cormorant management plan that will more effectively deal with conflicts.

Alternatives

As stated in the notice of intent, we will develop management alternatives to be considered in the EIS after the scoping process, based on the Service's mission and the comments received during scoping. As of March 3, 2000, we had received 205 written comments in response to our notice of intent. From those letters, the following management options were identified, in order of frequency:

1. Control/reduce cormorant populations.
2. Protect cormorants.
3. Initiate a hunting season on cormorants.
4. Remove cormorants from protection of Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
5. Oil cormorant eggs.
6. Use population objectives in cormorant management.
7. Do not develop a management plan as one is not needed.
8. Expand Depredation Order to other States.
9. Let States manage cormorants.
10. Change depredation permit policy.
11. Emphasize non-lethal control.
12. Give USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services more authority.

We are soliciting your comments on these options and any other issues, options, and impacts to be addressed in the EIS.

Issue Resolution and Environmental Review

After completion of the scoping process for the EIS, we will prepare a discussion of the potential effects, by alternative, which will include, but will not be limited to, the following areas: (1) Double-crested cormorant populations;