

examination and assessment. TSA estimates that there will be 600 respondents annually.

It will take each respondent approximately one hour to complete the certification form for a total annual hour burden of 600 hours.

Dated: October 19, 2015.

Christina A. Walsh,

TSA Paperwork Reduction Act Officer, Office of Information Technology.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R1-ES-2015-N191;
FXES11120100000-156-FF01E00000]

Draft Habitat Conservation Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment, Meier Group LLC, Thurston County, Washington

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), have received an application from The Meier Group, LLC (applicant) for an incidental take permit (permit) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). The applicant requests a permit with a 5-year term that would authorize “take” of the threatened Olympia pocket gopher incidental to otherwise lawful land development in Thurston County, Washington. The application includes the applicant’s draft habitat conservation plan (HCP), which describes the actions the applicant will implement to minimize and mitigate the impacts of incidental take caused by covered activities. The Service also announces the availability of a draft environmental assessment (EA) that has been prepared in response to the permit application in accordance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We are making the permit application, including the draft HCP and the draft EA, available for public review and comment.

DATES: To ensure consideration, please submit written comments by December 28, 2015.

ADDRESSES: To request further information or submit written comments, please use one of the following methods, and note that your information request or comments are in reference to the “Meier HCP/EA”:

- *Internet:* You may view or download copies of the draft HCP and draft EA and obtain additional information on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/>.

- *Email:* www.wfwocomments@fws.gov. Include “Meier HCP/EA” in the subject line of the message.

- *U.S. Mail:* Tim Romanski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE., Suite 102, Lacey, Washington 98503.

- *In-Person Drop-off, Viewing, or Pickup:* Call 360-753-5823 to make an appointment (necessary for viewing or picking up documents only) during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE., Suite 102, Lacey, Washington 98503. Written comments can be dropped off during regular business hours at the above address on or before the closing date of the public comment period (see **DATES**).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Romanski, Conservation Planning and Hydropower Branch Chief, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office (see **ADDRESSES**), telephone: 360-753-5823. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf, please call the Federal Information Relay Service at 800-877-8339.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Section 9 of the ESA prohibits “take” of fish and wildlife species listed as endangered or threatened. Under the ESA, the term “take” means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct (16 U.S.C. 1532(19)). The term “harm,” as defined in our regulations, includes significant habitat modification or degradation that results in death or injury to listed species by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering (50 CFR 17.3). The term “harass” is defined in our regulations as an intentional or negligent act or omission which creates the likelihood of injury to wildlife by annoying it to such an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavioral patterns, which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, or sheltering (50 CFR 17.3).

Under specified circumstances, the Service may issue permits that authorize take of federally listed species, provided the take is incidental to, but not the purpose of, an otherwise lawful activity. Regulations governing permits for

endangered and threatened species are at 50 CFR 17.22 and 17.32, respectively. Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Act contains provisions that authorize the Service to issue permits to non-Federal entities for the take of endangered and threatened species, provided the following criteria are met:

- (1) The taking will be incidental;
- (2) The applicant will prepare a conservation plan that, to the maximum extent practicable, minimize and mitigate the impact of such taking;
- (3) The applicant will ensure that adequate funding for the plan will be provided;
- (4) The taking will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of the species in the wild; and

- (5) The applicant will carry out any other measures that the Service may require as being necessary or appropriate for the purposes of the plan.

We have received an application from the Meier Group, LLC (applicant) for an incidental take permit pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). The applicant requests a permit with a 5-year term that would authorize “take” of the threatened Olympia pocket gopher (*Thomomys mazama pugetensis*) incidental to otherwise lawful land development and habitat conservation activities on land they own in Thurston County, Washington. The application includes a draft HCP, which describes the actions the applicant will take to minimize and mitigate the impacts of the take on the covered species. The Service also announces the availability of a draft environmental assessment (EA) addressing the draft HCP and proposed permit. We invite comments from all interested parties regarding the permit application, including the draft HCP and the draft EA.

Proposed Action

The applicant proposes to develop an approximately 6.4-acre property in the City of Tumwater, Thurston County, Washington, over the course of the next 5 years. The proposed project would entail clearing most of the 6.4-acre property of trees and other vegetation, including the invasive non-native Scot’s broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), in preparation for construction of a two-story commercial office building and associated facilities. The proposed office building, paved surfaces, and parking areas would cover all of the property except an approximately 0.7-acre area that would be avoided to prevent impacts to guy-wires associated with overhead electric transmission lines.

Approximately 2.7 acres of the 6.4-acre property is occupied by and provides habitat for the Olympia pocket gopher. Periodic mowing of the transmission line right-of-way keeps invasive vegetation controlled, which likely maintains habitat suitability for the pocket gopher. About 2.0 acres of the approximately 2.7 acres of potential pocket gopher habitat on the project site would be lost due to site preparation and construction activities under the proposed project. Olympia pocket gophers and their habitat would not be expected to persist in this area upon completion of the proposed project. Approximately 0.7 acre of the degraded grassland area beneath the transmission lines would remain undisturbed. Any pocket gophers in the remnant habitat patch may be able to survive for some period of time after project completion; however, the fragmentation, loss of foraging habitat, and reproductive isolation of remaining individuals makes long-term persistence of a viable population in this area unlikely.

The applicant's draft HCP identifies measures intended to minimize and mitigate for the incidental take of the covered species. The draft HCP's mitigation measures consist of a conservation program that includes dedication of an off-site 2.5-acre permanent conservation land area at a location known as Bush Prairie Farm, that would be managed for the benefit of the Olympia pocket gopher. The proposed HCP would establish a conservation easement on Bush Prairie Farm that removes the threat of future development on the conservation site, and provide funding to ensure that the conservation site is managed to maintain long-term habitat suitability for the covered species. The Bush Prairie Farm 2.5-acre conservation site is approximately 1,000 feet away from the only designated critical habitat for the Olympia pocket gopher. The conservation site is separated by a highway from the 676 acres of designated critical habitat that is located on the Olympia Regional Airport property. The conservation site is also adjacent to other sites proposed for long-term management for the listed species. Securing long-term protection and management of the proposed conservation site could expand priority conservation areas that may contribute to recovery of this species.

The Service proposes to issue the requested permit with a 5-year term based on the applicant's commitment to implement the draft HCP, if permit issuance criteria are met. Covered activities include construction, land development, and conservation of

covered species. The area covered under the draft HCP consists of a project development site totaling 6.4 acres and a conservation site totaling 2.5 acres. Take would occur primarily on the already fragmented project development site and be mitigated for by managing a higher quality block of habitat for the covered species on the conservation site. A conservation easement with associated funding assurances would be executed by the applicant to ensure ongoing management of the conservation site.

National Environmental Policy Act Compliance

The proposed issuance of a permit is a Federal action that triggers the need for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*; NEPA). Pursuant to NEPA, we have prepared a draft EA to analyze the environmental impacts of three alternatives related to the issuance of the requested permit and implementation of the conservation program under the proposed HCP. The three alternatives analyzed in the EA are a no-action alternative, the proposed action, and an avoidance alternative.

No-action alternative: Under the no-action alternative, no construction or development would occur on the proposed project site. Because no impacts to listed species are expected under this alternative, no HCP would be needed and no permit would be issued.

Proposed action alternative: The proposed action alternative is the implementation of the proposed HCP and issuance of the requested 5-year permit as described above.

Avoidance alternative: The avoidance alternative would limit construction and development on the project site to areas where impacts to listed species could be avoided. Because no impacts to listed species are expected under this alternative, no HCP would be needed and no permit would be issued.

Public Comments

You may submit your comments and materials by one of the methods listed in the **ADDRESSES** section. We specifically request information, views, and recommendations from interested parties regarding our proposed Federal action, including identification of any other aspects of the human environment not already identified in the draft EA pursuant to NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6. Further, we specifically solicit information regarding the adequacy of the applicant's draft HCP pursuant to the requirements for permits at 50 CFR parts 13 and 17.

Public Availability of Comments

All comments and materials we receive become part of the public record associated with this action. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personally identifiable information in your comments, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personally identifiable information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personally identifiable information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public disclosure in their entirety. Comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation we use in preparing the EA, will be available for public inspection by appointment, during normal business hours, at our Washington Fish and Wildlife Office (see **ADDRESSES**).

Next Steps

We will evaluate the permit application, associated documents, and any comments we receive, to determine whether the permit application meets the requirements of section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA. We will also evaluate whether issuance of the requested section 10(a)(1)(B) permit would comply with section 7 of the Act by conducting an intra-Service section 7 consultation on anticipated permit actions. After completion of the EA based on consideration of public comments, we will determine whether the proposed action warrants a finding of no significant impact or whether an environmental impact statement should be prepared. The final NEPA and permit determinations will not be completed until after the end of the 30-day comment period and will fully consider all comments received during the comment period. If we determine that all requirements are met, we will issue an incidental take permit under section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA to the applicants for the take of covered species, incidental to otherwise lawful covered activities.

Authority

We provide this notice in accordance with the requirements of section 10 of the Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) and their

implementing regulations (50 CFR 17.22 and 40 CFR 1506.6, respectively).

Richard Hannan,

Deputy Regional Director, Pacific Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-HQ-WSFR-2015-

N195;FVWF97820900000-XXX-FF09W13000 and FVWF54200900000-XXX-FF09W13000]

Information Collection Request Sent to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Approval; National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR)

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: We (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) have sent an Information Collection Request (ICR) to OMB for review and approval. We summarize the ICR below and describe the nature of the collection and the estimated burden and cost. We may not conduct or sponsor and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

DATES: You must submit comments on or before November 25, 2015.

ADDRESSES: Send your comments and suggestions on this information collection to the Desk Officer for the Department of the Interior at OMB-OIRA at (202) 395-5806 (fax) or *OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov* (email). Please provide a copy of your comments to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803 (mail), or *hope_grey@fws.gov* (email). Please include "1018-0088" in the subject line of your comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To request additional information about this ICR, contact Hope Grey at *hope_grey@fws.gov* (email) or 703-358-2482 (telephone). You may view the ICR online at <http://www.reginfo.gov>. Follow the instructions to view Department of the Interior collections under review by OMB.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Information Collection Request

OMB Control Number: 1018-0088.

Title: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR).

Service Form Number: None.

Type of Request: Reinstatement with change of a previously approved collection.

Description of Respondents: Individuals and households.

Respondent's Obligation: Voluntary.

Frequency of Collection: Pre-screener internet/paper questionnaire data collection will be conducted in January 2016. Household screen interviews and the first detailed sportsperson and wildlife-watcher interviews will be conducted April-June 2016. The second detailed interviews will be conducted September-October 2016. The third and last detailed interviews will be conducted January-March 2017.

Estimated Number of Annual Responses: 29,179.

Estimated Completion Time per Response: Varies from 5 to 35 minutes.

Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 6,355.

Estimated Annual Non-hour Burden Cost: None.

Abstract: The information collected for the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR) assists the Fish and Wildlife Service in administering the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration grant programs. The 2016 FHWAR will provide up-to-date information on the uses and demands for wildlife-related recreation resources, trends in uses of those resources, and a basis for developing and evaluating programs and projects to meet existing and future needs.

We collect the information in conjunction with carrying out our responsibilities under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 777-777m), commonly referred to as the Dingell-Johnson Act, and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. 669-669i), commonly referred to as the Pittman-Robertson Act. Under these acts, as amended, we provide approximately \$1 billion in grants annually to States for projects that support sport fish and wildlife management and restoration, including:

- Improvement of fish and wildlife habitats,
- Fishing and boating access,
- Fish stocking, and
- Hunting and fishing opportunities.

We also provide grants for aquatic education and hunter education, maintenance of completed projects, and research into problems affecting fish and wildlife resources. These projects help to ensure that the American people have adequate opportunities for fish and wildlife recreation.

We conduct the survey about every 5 years. The 2016 FHWAR will be the 12th conducted since 1955. We sponsor the survey at the States' request, which is made through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. We contract with the Census Bureau, which collects the information using computer-assisted telephone or in-person interviews. The Census Bureau will select a sample of sportspersons and wildlife watchers from a household screen and conduct three detailed interviews during the survey year. The survey collects information on the number of days of participation, species of animals sought, and expenditures for trips and equipment. Information on the characteristics of participants includes age, income, sex, education, race, and State of residence.

Federal and State agencies use information from the survey to make policy decisions related to fish and wildlife restoration and management. Participation patterns and trend information help identify present and future needs and demands. Land managing agencies use the data on expenditures and participation to assess the value of wildlife-related recreational uses of natural resources. Wildlife-related recreation expenditure information is used to estimate the economic impact on the economy and to support the dedication of tax revenues for fish and wildlife restoration programs.

Comments Received and Our Responses

Comments: On February 18, 2015, we published in the **Federal Register** (80 FR 8681) a notice of our intent to request that OMB approve this information collection. In that notice, we solicited comments for 60 days, ending on April 20, 2015. We received two comments, both from the same individual. This individual was concerned that the survey estimates are presented as aggregations of wildlife watching, hunting, and fishing data, suggesting this biases the results toward hunting and fishing and away from wildlife watching. The Census Bureau draws scientifically designed separate samples of wildlife watchers and sportspersons. These samples are interviewed independently, and estimates of each activity are tabulated separately in the Survey reports. We did not make any changes to the survey based on these comments.

Request for Public Comments

We again invite comments concerning this information collection on:

- Whether or not the collection of information is necessary, including