

from the Director, Office of Self-Governance whether it has been selected to receive an advance planning grant.

In order to provide sufficient time for tribes/consortia to effectively use the planning and negotiation grants, the following target dates have been established for the awarding of grants.

(1) *Negotiation Grants*: Since agreements for the 1998 fiscal year need to be signed and submitted by July 1, 1998, to allow sufficient time to prepare for negotiations, new participating tribes will be selected and awarded negotiation grants by May 1, 1998.

(2) *Advance Planning Grants*: In order to avoid delays in planning activity and future participation in tribal self-governance, advance planning grants will be awarded to tribes/consortia by July 1, 1998.

Submitting Applications

(1) Applications must be submitted in accordance with the interim rule published in the **Federal Register** on April 23, 1996, and by the deadlines identified in this announcement.

(2) Applications may be mailed or hand-delivered.

(3) Applications which are mailed must be postmarked no later than the date given in this notice for the particular type of grant being applied for.

Dated: January 14, 1998.

William A. Sinclair,

Director, Office of Self-Governance.

[FR Doc. 98-1289 Filed 1-20-98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-02-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of the Secretary

Alaska Land Managers Forum

AGENCY: Office of the Secretary.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice is published in accordance with section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), 5 U.S.C. App. (1988) and 41 CFR 101-6.1015(b). The Department of the Interior hereby gives notice of a public meeting of the Alaska Land Managers Forum to be held from 8:30 a.m. to noon on Wednesday, January 28, 1998. The meeting will take place in Conference Room 114, 1689 C Street, Anchorage, Alaska. This meeting will be held to receive and discuss work group reports on recreation and tourism. The agenda will also include several briefing items.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ronald B. McCoy at (907) 271-5485 or Sally Rue at (907) 465-4084.

Deborah L. Williams,

Special Assistant to the Secretary for Alaska.

[FR Doc. 98-1300 Filed 1-20-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Availability of an Environmental Assessment, Finding of No Significant Impact, and Receipt of an Application for an Incidental Take Permit by International Paper Company for Timber Management Practices on its Lands in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: International Paper Company (Applicant) seeks an incidental take permit (ITP) from the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), as amended (Act). The permit would apply to all of the applicant's land holdings in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina that contain the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) (*Picoides borealis*). The applicant has a total of 18 known active clusters in Alabama (2), Georgia (2), South Carolina (9), and Louisiana (5). The applicant wants to eventually transfer its baseline responsibility of 18 RCW clusters to its Southlands Experimental Forest (SEF) in Bainbridge, Georgia where there are currently two active RCW clusters. This ITP would authorize take of the existing 16 RCW groups in Alabama, South Carolina, and Louisiana incidental to timber management activities, plus any clusters in excess of the baseline at SEF.

The Service also announces the availability of an environmental assessment (EA) and Habitat Conservation Plan/Application for Incidental Taking (HCP). Copies of the EA and/or HCP may be obtained by making a request to the Regional Office (see ADDRESSES). Requests must be in writing to be processed. This notice also advises the public that the Service has made a preliminary determination that issuing the ITP is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of the

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on information contained in the EA and HCP. The final determination will be made no sooner than 30 days from the date of this notice. This notice is provided pursuant to Section 10 of the Act and NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1506.6). The Service specifically requests comment on the appropriateness of the "No Surprises" assurances should the Service determine that an ITP will be granted and based upon the submitted HCP. Although not explicitly stated in the HCP, the Service has, since August 1994, announced its intention to honor a "No Surprises" Policy for applicants seeking ITPs. Copies of the Service's "No Surprises" Policy may be obtained by making a written request to the Regional Office (see ADDRESSES). The Service is soliciting public comments and review of the applicability of the "No Surprises" Policy to this application and HCP.

DATES: Written comments on the permit application, EA, and HCP should be sent to the Service's Regional Office (see ADDRESSES) and should be received on or before February 20, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Persons wishing to review the application, HCP, and EA may obtain a copy by writing the Service's Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta, Georgia. Documents will also be available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours at the Regional Office, 1875 Century Boulevard, Suite 200, Atlanta, Georgia 30345 (Attn: Endangered Species Permits), or Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Brunswick Field Office, 4270 Norwich Street, Brunswick, Georgia 31520. Written data or comments concerning the application, EA, or HCP should be submitted to the Regional Office. Requests for the documentation must be in writing to be processed. Comments must be submitted in writing to be processed. Please reference permit number PRT-833203 in such comments, or in requests of the documents discussed herein.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Rick G. Gooch, Regional Permit Coordinator, (see ADDRESSES above), telephone: 404/679-7110; or Mr. Robert Brooks, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Brunswick Field Office, (see ADDRESSES above), telephone: 912/265-9336.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: *Picoides borealis* (or RCW) is a non-migratory species that once was common in the southern Coastal Plain from east Texas to Florida and north to Maryland,

Missouri, and Kentucky. RCWs nest in cavities constructed in living mature (typically > 60 years old) pine trees. The RCW is a cooperative breeder living in groups of one to nine birds with each bird nesting in a cavity; the aggregate of cavity trees is called a cluster. RCWs prefer longleaf pine forests, but it will also utilize loblolly, pond, slash, shortleaf, and even Virginia pines. Without periodic fire to control hardwoods, RCWs will abandon cluster sites. The decline of the RCW has resulted primarily from loss of its mature southern pine habitat from logging and conversion to non-forest and from fire exclusion.

Recovery activities for the RCW are focused on public lands. However, private lands are also important for the RCW in the Service's recovery strategy by: (1) Providing supplement habitat where the federal land base is insufficient to support recovery; (2) establishing and maintaining connection between and within populations on public lands; and/or, (3) providing a supply of juvenile RCWs for translocation into defined recovery populations. Unfortunately, RCWs on private lands have fared poorly because landowners are not inclined to manage their lands for RCW habitat because the bird's presence might impose restrictions on timber harvesting and development. The Service believes the private land RCW clusters that are geographically isolated will eventually cease to exist if private landowners are not encouraged to manage their lands for these birds.

The applicant, International Paper Company, proposes to sustain RCWs on its lands through the creation of a migration bank on its SEF property in Bainbridge, Georgia. This proposed mitigation bank at SEF currently contains 5300 acres of contiguous forests and the applicant proposes to establish and keep 3000 acres of high quality RCW habitat at this site. This would be enough habitat to eventually support about 25-30 RCW groups. Currently there are about 1500 acres of high quality RCW habitat and two RCW groups at SEF. The applicant is proposing translocation, cavity augmentations, and intensive habitat management at the SEF site to increase the RCW population. The applicant currently has 18 known RCW groups on its lands in Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, and they will keep their baseline responsibility of 18 RCW groups at the proposed mitigation bank at SEF, with the Service and state concurrence. The Service believes the applicants' extant RCW population will ultimately benefit from

this proposed mitigation bank in that a more stable RCW population will be created and the applicant will be better able to intensively manage the RCWs at SEF.

The EA considers the environmental consequences of three alternatives, in addition to the proposed action. The no action alternative may result in loss of habitat and individual groups of *Picoides borealis* due to fragmented habitat, geographic isolation of the groups, and lack of intensive management. The proposed action alternative is issuance of the ITP with mitigation on the applicant's property. To compensate for the proposed taking of RCW groups, the applicant proposes to establish RCW groups on SEF before any taking occurs. The applicant also proposes to sell mitigation credits to third parties seeking incidental take permits for RCW on other private lands should additional groups above baseline be created during the life of the mitigation bank. The third alternative is to issue the ITP and mitigate for the taking of RCW groups on federal, state, or other private lands. The fourth alternative is for the Service to provide financial incentives to the applicant to intensively manage the RCW clusters on their lands.

As stated above, the Service has made a preliminary determination that the issuance of the ITP is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. This preliminary information may be revised due to public comment received in response to this notice and is based on information contained in the EA and HCP. An appropriate excerpt from the FONSI reflecting the Service's finding on the application is provided below:

Based on the analysis conducted by the Service, it has been determined that:

1. Issuance of an ITP will not appreciably reduce the likelihood of survival and recovery of the affected species in the wild.
2. This HCP contains provisions which sufficiently minimize and mitigate the impacts to the extent practicable.
3. Issuance of an ITP would not have significant effects on the human environment in the project area.
4. The proposed take is incidental to an otherwise lawful activity.
5. Adequate funding will be provided to implement the measures proposed in the submitted HCP.

The Service will also evaluate whether the issuance of a Section 10(a)(1)(B) ITP complies with Section 7 of the Act by conducting an intra-

Service Section 7 consultation. The results of the biological opinion, in combination with the above findings, will be used in the final analysis to determine whether or not to issue the ITP.

Dated: January 13, 1998.

H. Dale Hall,

Deputy Regional Director.

[FR Doc. 98-1332 Filed 1-20-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Availability of an Environmental Assessment and Receipt of an Application for an Endangered Species Act Incidental Take Permit for the U.S. Borax Project in Kern County, CA

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: U.S. Borax, Incorporated has applied to the Fish and Wildlife Service for a 50-year incidental take permit pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). In the 1,940-acre project area near the town of Boron, Kern County, California, the Service proposes to issue an incidental take permit and provide assurances to the applicant for the threatened desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and the following Federal species of concern: Mojave ground squirrel (*Spermophilus mohavensis*), American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), Le Conte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), desert kit fox (*Vulpes acrotis arsipus*), greenest tiger beetle (*Cicindela tranquebarica viridissima*), Mojave spineflower (*Chorizanthe spinosa*), and sagebrush loeflingia (*Loeflingia squarrosa* var. *artemisiarum*). The proposed permit would be effective upon issuance for species currently listed under the Act. The permit would become effective for unlisted species included in the permit upon their listing under the Act. This notice opens the comment period on the Environmental Assessment and permit application package, which includes a Habitat Conservation Plan and Implementation Agreement. The Service specifically requests comment on the appropriateness of the "No Surprises" assurances contained in section V.C.1 of the Implementation Agreement. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record and may be made available to the public.