



Monday
August 30, 1999

Part V

**Department of the
Interior**

Fish and Wildlife Service

**Migratory Bird Hunting; Environmental
Impact Statement on White Goose
Management; Notice**

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service****Migratory Bird Hunting; Environmental Impact Statement on White Goose Management; Notice**

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meetings.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service or "we") is issuing this notice to invite public participation in the scoping process for preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that considers a range of management alternatives aimed at addressing population expansion of lesser snow geese, Ross' geese, and greater snow geese (white geese). This notice invites further public participation in the scoping process, identifies the location, date, and time of public scoping meetings, and identifies the Service official to whom questions and comments may be directed.

DATES: Written comments regarding EIS scoping should be submitted by November 22, 1999, to the address below. Dates for nine public scoping meetings are identified in the

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION section.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Suite 634—Arlington, VA 22203. Alternatively, comments may be submitted electronically to the following address: white—goose—eis@fws.gov. The public may inspect comments during normal business hours in Room 634 " Arlington Square Building, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia. Locations for nine public scoping meetings are identified in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Jon Andrew, Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, (703) 358-1714, or James Kelley, Office of Migratory Bird Management (703) 358-1964.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On May 13, 1999, we published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS on white goose management (64 FR 26268). This action is in response to population expansion of white geese, which has resulted in habitat degradation in certain breeding, migration, and/or wintering areas of the three species of geese involved.

Lesser Snow Geese and Ross' Geese

We believe that the combined population of lesser snow geese and

Ross' geese in the mid-continent region has exceeded the long-term carrying capacity of its breeding habitat and must be reduced. These geese have become seriously injurious to their arctic and subarctic habitat and habitat important to other migratory birds. We believe that population reduction measures are necessary to prevent further habitat destruction and to protect the remaining habitat upon which numerous wildlife species depend. The Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group estimated that the combined population of lesser snow geese and Ross' geese in the mid-continent region should be reduced by 50% by 2005 (Batt 1997). That would suggest a reduction from the 1999 winter index of approximately 2.8 million birds to approximately 1.4 million birds.

Greater Snow Geese

The greater snow goose population has expanded from less than 50,000 birds in the late 1960s to approximately 700,000 today. With a growth rate of about 9% per year, the population is expected to reach 1,000,000 by 2002 and 2,000,000 by 2010 (Batt 1998). While researchers have not documented the damage to the breeding habitat of greater snow geese to the same degree as the mid-continent white geese, high populations of greater snow geese are negatively impacting natural marshes in the St. Lawrence estuary and some coastal marshes of the Mid-Atlantic U.S. (Batt 1998). The Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group recommended that the population be stabilized by the year 2002 at between 800,000 to 1,000,000 birds (Batt 1998). This strategy is intended to prevent the destruction of arctic habitat that is likely to occur if the population exceeds the carrying-capacity of breeding areas.

Alternatives

We are considering the following alternatives as a result of public comments we received previously. After the scoping process, we will develop the alternatives to be included in the EIS and base them on the mission of the Service and comments received during scoping. We are soliciting your comments on issues, alternatives, and impacts to be addressed in the EIS.

A. No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no additional regulatory methods or direct population control strategies would be authorized. Existing white goose hunting regulations would remain in place.

B. New Regulatory Alternatives (Proposed Action)

This alternative seeks to provide new regulatory options to wildlife management agencies that will increase the harvest of white geese above that which results from existing hunting frameworks. This approach may include legalization of additional hunting methods such as electronic calls, unplugged shotguns, and expanded shooting hours. This alternative also includes establishment of a conservation order in the U.S. to reduce and/or stabilize white goose populations. A conservation order would authorize taking of white geese after the normal framework closing date of March 10, through August 31.

The intent of this alternative is to significantly reduce or stabilize white goose populations without threatening their long-term health. We are confident that reduction or stabilization efforts will not result in populations falling below either the lower management thresholds established by Flyway Councils, or the North American Waterfowl Management Plan population objectives. Monitoring and evaluation programs are in place to estimate population sizes and will be used to prevent over-harvest of these populations.

C. Direct Population Control on Wintering and Migration Areas in the U.S.

This alternative would involve direct population control strategies such as trapping and culling programs, market hunting, or other general strategies that would result in the killing of white geese on migration and/or wintering areas in the U.S. Some of these types of control measures could involve disposal of large numbers of carcasses.

D. Seek Direct Population Control on Breeding Grounds by Canada

This alternative, if successful, would involve direct population control strategies, such as trapping and culling programs, market hunting, or other general strategies, that would result in killing of white geese on breeding colonies in Canada. Some of these types of control measures could involve disposal of large numbers of carcasses. We do not have the authority to implement direct population control measures on migration or breeding areas in Canada. Therefore, this alternative would require extensive consultation with Canada in order to urge implementation of control measures on breeding areas. Such measures may or

may not involve active U.S. participation.

Issue Resolution and Environmental Review

The primary issue to be addressed during the scoping and planning process for the EIS is to determine which management alternatives for the control of white goose populations will be analyzed. We will prepare a discussion of the potential effect, by alternative, which will include the following areas:

- (1) White goose populations and their habitats.
- (2) Other bird populations and their habitats.
- (3) Effects on other species of flora and fauna.
- (4) Socioeconomic effects.

Environmental review of the management action will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as appropriate. This Notice is being furnished in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7, to obtain suggestions and information from other agencies, tribes, and the public on the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS. A draft EIS should be available to the public in the winter of 2000.

Public Scoping Meetings

Nine public scoping meetings will be held on the following dates at the indicated locations and times:

1. September 29, 1999; Pomona, NJ at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, A Wing Lecture Hall, Jimmie Leeds Road, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

2. September 30, 1999; Dover, DE at the Richardson and Robbins Auditorium, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, 89 Kings Highway, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

3. October 3, 1999; Sacramento, CA at the Auditorium, Resource Building, 1416 Ninth St., 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

4. October 5, 1999; Rosenberg, TX at the Texas Agricultural Extension Service Building, 1436 Band Road, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

5. October 6, 1999; Baton Rouge, LA at the Louisiana Room, First Floor, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Building, 2000 Quail Drive, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

6. October 12, 1999; Bismarck, ND at the North Dakota Game and Fish Department Auditorium, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

7. October 13, 1999; Bloomington, MN at the Best Western Thunderbird Hotel and Convention Center, 2201 East 78th Street, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

8. October 14, 1999; Kansas City, MO at the Holiday Inn Sports Complex, 4011 Blue Ridge Cutoff, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

9. October 21, 1999; Washington, DC in the Auditorium of the Department of the Interior Building, 1849 C Street NW, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Meeting participants may choose to submit oral and/or written comments on the EIS scoping process. To facilitate planning, we request that individuals or organizations that desire to submit oral comments at meetings to send us their name and the meeting location at which comments will be submitted. Name and

meeting location information should be sent to the location indicated under the **ADDRESSES** caption. However, submission of names prior to a particular meeting is not required in order to present oral comments at any meeting.

Written comments may also be submitted by November 22, 1999, to the location indicated under the **ADDRESSES** caption. Alternatively, comments may be submitted electronically by November 22, 1999, to the following email address:
white_goose_eis@fws.gov.

References Cited

- Batt, B.D.J., editor. 1997. Arctic ecosystems in peril: report of the Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group. Arctic Goose Joint Venture Special Publication. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC and Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario. 120pp.
- Batt, B.D.J., editor. 1998. The greater snow goose: report of the Arctic Goose Habitat Working Group. Arctic Goose Joint Venture Special Publication. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC and Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario. 88pp.

Authorship

The primary author of this Notice is James R. Kelley, Jr., Office of Migratory Bird Management.

Dated: August 24, 1999.

Paul R. Schmidt,

Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 99-22382 Filed 8-27-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P