

salmon and threatened Central Valley steelhead to assess potential impacts of water transfers on Central Valley fall-run Chinook salmon, spring-run Chinook salmon, and steelhead in the lower Yuba River. J&S requests authorization for an estimated total take of 18,306 adult spring-run Chinook salmon (that includes 0.5 percent incidental mortality) and 2,000 adult steelhead (0.5 percent incidental mortality) resulting from observation and release of adult fish, and 619,865 juvenile spring-run Chinook salmon (0.9 percent incidental mortality) and 18,324 juvenile steelhead (2 percent incidental mortality) resulting from capture, handling, and releasing of juvenile fish.

CDWR requests a 5-year permit (1431) for take of adult and juvenile Central Valley spring-run Chinook salmon and Central Valley steelhead associated with studies to evaluate the effects of Oroville-Thermalito Complex operations on anadromous fishes in the Feather River. The studies concern spring-run Chinook salmon holding areas and spawning areas, Chinook salmon spawning escapement surveys, and steelhead life history. CDWR requests authorization for an estimated annual take resulting from carcass surveys, marking, releasing, and/or tissue samples of 40,555 adult spring-run Chinook salmon (that includes >0.01 percent incidental mortality) for the first 3 years and 50 adult spring-run Chinook salmon annually thereafter, 115 adult steelhead (4 percent incidental mortality), and 775 juvenile steelhead (3 percent incidental mortality) resulting from the proposed studies.

Dated: April 11, 2003.

Phil Williams,

Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 040103B]

Availability of Draft Environmental Assessment

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

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comment.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that NMFS has prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) of impacts on the human environment of the potential issuance of three enhancement permits authorizing take of listed salmon and steelhead in the upper Columbia River Basin associated with the operation of artificial propagation programs. This document serves to notify the public of the availability of the draft EA for review and comment before a final decision on whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact is made by NMFS.

DATES: Written comments on the draft EA must be received no later than 5 p.m. Pacific daylight time on May 2, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the application should be sent to Hatcheries and Inland Fisheries Branch, Sustainable Fisheries Division, NMFS, 525 N.E. Oregon Street, Suite 510, Portland, Oregon 97232. Comments may also be sent via fax to (503) 872-2737. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or the Internet. Requests for copies of the draft EA should be directed to the Portland office. The document also is available on the Internet at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/> or it may be reviewed by appointment during business hours at the Portland office by calling (503) 230-5409.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Kristine Petersen, Portland, Oregon, at phone number: (503) 230-5409, e-mail: Kristine.Petersen@noaa.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This document is relevant to the following species and evolutionarily significant units (ESUs):

Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*): endangered Upper Columbia River.

Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*): endangered Upper Columbia River spring run.

Background

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to conduct an environmental analysis of their proposed actions to determine if the actions may affect the human environment. NMFS expects to take action on ESA section 10(a)(1)(A) submittals expected from the applicants. Therefore NMFS is seeking public input on the scope of the required NEPA analysis, including the range of reasonable alternatives and associated impacts of any alternatives.

On June 12, 2002, NMFS received an application for an ESA section 10 permit from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife requesting a multi-

year authorization for an annual take of Upper Columbia River steelhead and Upper Columbia River spring chinook salmon associated with proposed steelhead artificial propagation programs intended to enhance the natural production of ESA-listed Upper Columbia River steelhead. Notice of the receipt of this permit application was published in the **Federal Register** on August 1, 2002, and a public informational meeting was held on August 28, 2002, in Wenatchee, WA to inform the public of the receipt of this permit application.

In April 2002, negotiations on the Anadromous Fish Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) for Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project (FERC License Number 2145), Rock Island Hydroelectric Project (FERC License Number 943), and the Wells Hydroelectric Project (FERC License Number 2149) were completed related to the re-licensing of Wells Dam with Public Utilities District No. 1 of Douglas County, and Rocky Reach Dam, and Rock Island Dam with Public Utilities District No. 1 of Chelan County. These long-term agreements provide for mitigation in the form of artificial propagation programs to replace unavoidable losses to natural fish production. The artificial propagation component of each HCP specifies the number and species to be reared. The impacts of the HCP on the environment were considered in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which was published for comment in the **Federal Register** on December 27, 2002.

On June 11, 2002, NMFS received a similar application for an ESA section 10 permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, requesting a multi-year authorization for an annual take of Upper Columbia River steelhead and Upper Columbia River spring chinook salmon associated with a steelhead artificial propagation program in the Methow River Basin. Notice of the receipt of this permit application was published in the **Federal Register** on August 1, 2002, and a public informational meeting was held on August 28, 2002, in Wenatchee, WA to inform the public of the receipt of this permit application.

On October 23, 2002, NMFS received an application for a section 10 permit from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, requesting a multi-year authorization for an annual take of ESA-listed Upper Columbia River steelhead and Upper Columbia River spring chinook salmon associated with a steelhead artificial propagation program in the Okanogan River Basin.

Funding for this program has been allocated through the Pacific Salmon Coastal Recovery Fund administered by NMFS, and is consistent with Bureau of Reclamation steelhead recovery efforts ongoing in the Okanogan Basin. Notice of the receipt of this permit application was published in the **Federal Register** on January 14, 2003.

In total the proposed programs would provide artificial propagation and release of about 1.03 million ESA-listed Upper Columbia River steelhead into the Upper Columbia River Basin and for the monitoring and management of the returning adult steelhead to the Upper Columbia River Basin. The general effects on the environment considered include the impacts on the physical, biological, and socioeconomic environments of the Upper Columbia River Basin.

Dated: April 8, 2003.

Phil Williams,

Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 030409080-3080-01; I.D. 031103D]

RIN 0648-ZB41

Financial Assistance for North Atlantic Right Whale Research Programs Through A Competitive Grants Program

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice of solicitation for applications.

SUMMARY: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (hereinafter "we" or "us") issues this document to solicit applications for Federal assistance under the North Atlantic Right Whale Grant Program (RWGP). This document describes how to submit applications for funding in FY 2003 under the Program and how we will determine which applications will be funded. Under the RWGP, we will provide financial assistance to eligible researchers working within waters inhabited by North Atlantic right whales and submitting applications pertaining only to this species. Applications will be reviewed for eligibility, technical

merit, and consistency with the RWGP's goals and regional funding priorities. Final selection will be based on results of a peer review process (described below), as well as other restrictions based on appropriations language.

DATES: The application package must be postmarked by 5 p.m. (local time) June 16, 2003. The package must include: (1) one signed original of the entire application and all required forms, and (2) two signed copies of the entire application and all required forms (including supporting documentation). The applicant may also voluntarily submit an electronic copy (on CD or diskette in Microsoft Word v. 97 or earlier or WordPerfect v. 9 or lower) of the narrative project description.

ADDRESSES: All application packages should be sent to NOAA/NMFS Right Whale Grants Program, Protected Species Branch, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, email rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov.

Federal forms and required elements of the application packages can be obtained from the NMFS Right Whale Grants Program webpage at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/grantforms>. We cannot accept completed applications via the Internet or facsimile at this time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr Phillip J. Clapham, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, 508 495-2316, email rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Introduction

For fiscal year (FY) 2002, Congress directed that \$1 million for right whale research be administered through a competitive grants program operated by the Northeast Consortium. For FY 2003 (and in future years if continued), this grant program will be administered by NMFS as the Right Whale Grants Program (hereafter referred to as the RWGP). This document describes how to submit applications for funding in FY 2003 under the RWGP and how we will determine which applications will be funded.

A. Background

Management of marine mammal populations falls within the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 and, for some species, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The agency is mandated to conserve the endangered species under its jurisdiction, and must undertake actions to prevent further

decline of populations, facilitate their recovery, and safeguard the quality of their habitat.

The North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) is among the world's most endangered cetaceans. The population is believed to number only about 300 individuals and appears to be declining. The lack of recovery is due in part to high mortality from human sources, notably fishing gear entanglements and vessel collisions. A Recovery Plan is in effect (NMFS 1991), and conservation of this species is a high priority for NMFS. Research directed at facilitating such conservation or to provide monitoring of the population's status and health, is also a high priority for the agency.

The RWGP is conducted by the Secretary of Commerce to provide Federal assistance to eligible researchers for: (1) detection and tracking of right whales; (2) behavior of right whales in relation to ships; (3) relationships between vessel speed, size or design with whale collisions; (4) modeling of ship traffic along the Atlantic coast; (5) population monitoring and assessment studies; (6) reproduction, health and genetic studies; (7) development of a Geographic Information System database or other system designed to investigate predictive modeling of right whale distribution in relation to environmental variables; (8) habitat quality studies including food quality and pollutant levels; and (9) any other work relevant to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales. The RWGP is administered by the Protected Species Branch of the NOAA/NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

B. Objectives

The principal objectives of the RWGP are to fund research or other activities that can provide information useful to management of North Atlantic right whales, with emphasis on understanding or mitigation of factors inhibiting the species' recovery.

Successful applications will be those that have a high probability of providing novel information that can be used to monitor the status and health of the North Atlantic right whale population, or to improve management strategies aimed at reducing risk from human factors or at otherwise facilitating the population's recovery. Priority will be given to researchers with a demonstrated track record of publishing the results of previous work in the peer-reviewed scientific literature.