

**DATES:** Comments must be received by 5 p.m. on or before November 17, 2003. Public comments on this document are requested and will be considered before taking final action on this designation.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments may be mailed to Ms. Ann Rodney, Office of Ecosystem Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA—New England, One Congress Street, Suite 1100 (CWQ), Boston, MA 02114–2023 or electronically to [Rodney.Ann@epa.gov](mailto:Rodney.Ann@epa.gov).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Ms. Ann Rodney, (617) 918–1538 or e-mail [Rodney.Ann@epa.gov](mailto:Rodney.Ann@epa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

EPA is extending the public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed designation of dredged material disposal sites in the Central and Western Long Island Sound, Connecticut, and announcing the addition of a public hearing.

**Corrections**

The September 12, 2003 document (68 FR 53687–53696), is corrected on page 53688, 53689, 53690 and 53695 as follows:

1. On page 53688 in the preamble, first column, following the caption **DATES:**, the language is corrected to read: “Comments must be received by 5 p.m. on or before November 17, 2003. The additional public hearing date is November 13, 2003 from 4p.m.–8p.m.”. On page 53689 the language is corrected to read as follows: “Comments must be received by 5 p.m. on or before November 17, 2003.”.

2. On page 53688, in the preamble, first column, following the caption **ADDRESSES:**, Public Hearing Locations section, the language is corrected to read: “The Public Hearing locations are: 1. September 30, 2003—New York at SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794–1603—Charles B. Wang Asian-American Center 2. October 1, 2003 and November 13, 2003—Westin Stamford, One First Stamford Place, Stamford, CT 06902.”.

3. On page 53688, in the preamble, first column, following the caption **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**, the language is corrected to include the addition of libraries and is corrected to read: “Public Review of Documents: The file supporting this proposed designation is available for inspection at the following locations: In person. The Proposed Rule and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which includes the Site Management and Monitoring Plans (Appendix J), are available for inspection at the following locations: A. EPA New England Library, 11th Floor, One Congress Street, Suite

1100 (CWQ), Boston, MA 02114–2023. For access to the documents, call Peg Nelson at (617) 918–1991 between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday, excluding legal holidays, for an appointment. B. Mamaroneck Public Library Inc., 136 Prospect Ave., Mamaroneck, NY. C. Port Jefferson Free Library, 100 Thompson Street, Port Jefferson, NY. D. E. Bridgeport Public Library, 925 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT. E. Milford City Library, 57 New Haven Ave., Milford, CT. F. New Haven Free Public Library, 133 Elm Street, New Haven, CT. G. New London Public Library, 63 Huntington Street, New London, CT. H. Norwalk Public Library, 1 Belden Ave., Norwalk, CT. I. Acton Public Library, 60 Old Boston Post Road, Old Saybrook, CT. J. Ferguson Library, 752 High Ridge Road, Stamford, CT. K. Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston Street, Copley Square, Boston, MA. L. New York State Library, Cultural Education Center, 6th Floor, Empire State Center, Albany, NY. M. Information Service Division, CT State Library, 231 Capital Ave., Hartford, CT. Electronically. You also may review and/or obtain electronic copies of these documents and various support documents from the EPA home page at the **Federal Register**, <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/>, or on the EPA New England Region’s home page at <http://www.epa.gov/region1/eco/lisdrreg/>.”

4. On page 53690, Section D. Site Descriptions, second column is corrected to read as follows: CLIS 41°9.5′ N., 72°54.4′ W.; 41°9.5′ N., 72°51.5′ W.; 41°8.4′ N., 72°51.5′ W.; 41°8.4′ N., 72°54.4′ W. The third column is corrected to read as follows: WLIS 41°00.1′ N., 73°29.8′ W.; 41°00.1′ N., 73°28.0′ W.; 40°58.9′ N., 73°28.1′ W.; 40°58.9′ N., 73°29.8′ W.

**§ 228.15 [Corrected]**

5. On page 53695, in amendment 2. for § 228.15 paragraph (b)(3)(i) is corrected to read as follows: (i) Location: Corner Coordinates (NAD1983) 41°9.5′ N., 72°54.4′ W.; 41°9.5′ N., 72°51.5′ W.; 41°8.4′ N., 72°51.5′ W.; 41°8.4′ N., 72°54.4′ W. Paragraph (b)(4)(i) is corrected to read as follows: (i) Location: Corner Coordinates (NAD1983) 41°00.1′ N., 73°29.8′ W.; 41°00.1′ N., 73°28.0′ W.; 40°58.9′ N., 73°28.1′ W.; 40°58.9′ N., 73°29.8′ W.

Dated: October 3, 2003.

**Ira W. Leighton,**

*Acting Regional Administrator, EPA New England.*

[FR Doc. 03–25636 Filed 10–8–03; 8:45 am]

**BILLING CODE 6560–50–P**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 300**

[I.D. 091603E]

**National Marine Fisheries Service, Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment**

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

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an environmental assessment (EA); request for written comments; notice of public scoping meetings.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS announces its intent to prepare an EA and to hold scoping meetings to inform interested parties of the potential impacts on the human environment of the implementation of the regulatory changes resulting from the recently extended Treaty on Fisheries Between the Governments of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America (Treaty). As part of this process, NMFS intends to conduct two scoping meetings to allow stakeholders the opportunity to express their views regarding information that NMFS should consider in preparing the EA for the implementation of the regulatory changes required under the recently renegotiated Treaty.

**DATES:** The dates for the public scoping meetings are:

1. October 24, 2003, in San Diego, California.
2. November 13, 2003, in Pago Pago, American Samoa.

**ADDRESSES:** The scoping meeting locations are:

1. Embassy Suites Hotel, San Diego Bay, 4 p.m. – 10 p.m.
2. Utulei Convention Center, 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Written comments on the issues, range of alternatives, impacts that should be discussed in the EA, and requests to be included on a mailing list of persons interested in the EA should be sent to Raymond Clarke, International Affairs Division, Pacific Islands Regional Office, NMFS, 1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 1110, Honolulu, HI 96814. Comments may be sent to the Regional Office via facsimile (fax) at 808–973–2941 and must be received by December 8, 2003.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Charles Karnella or Raymond Clarke, telephone (808) 973–2937.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Background**

The Treaty entered into force in 1988. The Treaty is between the 16 members of the Pacific Islands Forum, an inter-governmental body that represents 16 sovereign Pacific Island Countries (PICs), and the United States of America. After an initial 5-year agreement, the Treaty was renewed in 1993 allowing access for up to 50 U.S. purse seiners (with an option for 5 more if agreed to by all parties) to the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the following countries: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa. The Treaty Area is approximately 10 million square miles in the western and central Pacific Ocean.

The Treaty sets out the terms and conditions associated with certain aspects of U.S. purse seine vessel operations and obtaining access to the PICs= EEZs. Treaty terms and conditions include, but are not limited to, various fees, area closures, reporting, and observer coverage requirements. Additionally, the United States Government has certain Treaty obligations that include, but are not limited to, administrative requirements, economic assistance fees, as well as the collection, compilation, and summarization of fishery related data.

Commencing in 2000, the U.S. and the PICs entered into a series of negotiations that led to an agreement to amend and extend the Treaty for 10 years or until June 14, 2012. The agreement recognizes that all parties involved in the negotiations were required to obtain the consent of their various legislative and/or executive bodies before the Treaty entered into law. The parties agreed to abide by the negotiated terms and conditions of the extension of the Treaty after June 15, 2003 B or when key provisions of the previous Treaty expired. This allowed the U.S. purse seine fleet to continue to operate and allowed the PICs to continue to benefit from the economic assistance associated with the Treaty. As of this writing all the parties have not ratified the re-negotiated Treaty.

Under the current agreement, the U.S. is obligated to pay an annual amount of \$21 million. The U.S. Government annually provides \$18 million under a technical assistance agreement, and the U.S. purse seine tuna industry, provides the additional \$3 million. These funds are paid to the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) located in Honiara, Solomon

Islands. Under the current (re-negotiated) Treaty, the U.S. is now limited to 40 vessels (and up to 5 additional vessels operating under joint venture agreements with PICs).

The changes to the operational requirements of the Treaty include: recognition of electronic media as an allowed method for meeting reporting requirements and information transmittal by the purse seine vessels, the use of electronic vessel monitoring systems while vessels operate in the Treaty Area, modifications by certain PICs to the areas in which fishing is permitted by U.S. purse seine vessels and correcting an unintended consequence of the drafting of the Treaty that prohibited pelagic longlining by U.S. vessels on the high seas areas (areas outside the 200-mile EEZ of any country) within the Treaty Area.

**NEPA Process**

The authorization by NMFS to the FFA to provide U.S. purse seine vessels a license to fish in the Treaty Area, which includes access to the EEZs of PICs is a Federal action. Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Federal agencies must insure that analysis of the environmental impacts of a range of alternative proposals is available to public officials and citizens before Federal decisions are made and before Federal actions are taken. The purpose is to promote management and policy decisions that will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment, stimulate the health and welfare of the public, and enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the nation. A key element of the NEPA process is the identification of the proposed action as well as a set of alternatives to the proposed action. The NEPA process, involving public review of the alternatives, is designed to provide the agency with information that enables identification of issues, concerns and reasonable alternatives. The proposed action now under consideration and the subject of this EA is the FFA's authorization of U.S. purse seine vessels to operate in the EEZs of certain PICs under the terms and conditions of the Treaty as amended and extended until June 2012.

NMFS is accepting written comments on the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts it should consider in the EA. These comments will be part of the public record.

**Alternatives**

At present the range of alternatives to be considered in the EA will probably include, but would not be limited to:

*NMFS does not propose a regulation to implement the changes proposed for the Third Extension of the Treaty (No Action Alternative).* Under this alternative, the Treaty would continue in the manner it has since June 15, 2003, pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed on May 9, 2002. That non-legally binding document represents the political commitment of the signatories to apply the amendments to the Treaty and Annexes that were not in force by June 15, 2003.

*NMFS proposes a regulation to implement the changes proposed for the Third Extension of the Treaty.* Under this alternative, the U.S. would implement the regulatory changes that have been agreed upon for the third extension of the Treaty. No new legislation would be required for the United States to implement such changes. Regulations would, however, have to be promulgated to require that U.S. tuna purse seine vessels licensed to fish under the Treaty comply with the prescribed vessel monitoring system (VMS) procedures and requirements. This action would implement VMS requirements that are consistent with FFA specifications and be applicable to persons and vessels subject to the Treaty and the jurisdiction of the United States. Operators wishing to fish under the Treaty would be required to install, carry, activate and operate, repair or replace a VMS unit while in the Treaty Area. This alternative also includes modifications to the regulations that would allow U.S. longline vessels to fish on the high seas within the Treaty Area, as well as modifications to the areas of fishing in the EEZs of the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.

*NMFS recommends that the U.S. withdraw from the Treaty.* In effecting withdrawal, the U.S. would first submit an instrument signifying withdrawal to the depositary, after which it would become effective 1 year later. The decision to withdraw from the Treaty could be taken if the U.S. believed it was no longer in the nation's best interest to continue participation. There are several scenarios under which such a withdrawal might occur.

*The termination of U.S. Purse Seine industry participation in the Treaty.* The organization of the Treaty provides the potential that the Treaty could continue without the participation of the U.S. purse seine industry. For instance, the United States Government could continue to provide economic assistance to the PICs called for under the Treaty. This economic assistance is now the only significant source of U.S. economic

support to the region (outside payments made to the Compact States of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau).

Other alternatives that may be explored may address non-target, associated and dependent species related to purse seine fishing. Comments on these alternatives, as well as issues and concerns are invited.

#### Additional Information Available

Information on the text of the Treaty, the authorizing legislation or the implementing regulations are available from the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office.

#### Special Accommodations

These meetings are accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Raymond Clarke, telephone 808-973-2937, fax 808-973-2941 at least 5 days before the scheduled meeting date.

**Authority:** 973-973r. *et seq.*

Dated: October 3, 2003.

**Bruce C. Morehead,**

*Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.*  
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**BILLING CODE 3510-22-S**

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 402

[ID 092603B]

RIN 1018-AJ02; RIN 0648-AR05

#### National Marine Fisheries Service; Joint Counterpart Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation Regulations

**AGENCIES:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior; Bureau of Land Management, Interior; National Park Service, Interior; Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior; Forest Service, Agriculture; National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule; reopening of comment period and notice of availability of Environmental Assessment.

**SUMMARY:** We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, (Services) announce the reopening of the comment period for the proposed joint counterpart regulations and the availability of the Environmental Assessment for the Healthy Forests Initiative Counterpart Regulations. The Services are evaluating the environmental effects of establishing counterpart regulations pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (ESA). These counterpart regulations are being proposed in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (FS) and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service (NPS) (jointly, Action Agencies). The proposal supports the President's Healthy Forests initiative and is intended to streamline ESA section 7 consultations on proposed projects that support the National Fire Plan (NFP).

We are reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule and the associated Environmental Assessment. Comments previously submitted on the proposed rule that was published in the **Federal Register** on June 5, 2003 (68 FR 33805), need not be resubmitted as they will be incorporated into the public record as part of this reopened comment period and will be fully considered in the final rule.

**DATES:** Comments on this environmental assessment or the associated proposed rule must be received by November 10, 2003 to be considered in the final decision.

**ADDRESSES:** Electronic copies of this Environmental Assessment or the associated proposed rule may be obtained from the USFWS World Wide Web Consultation Home Page at: <http://endangered.fws.gov/consultations/forestplan.html>. Written copies of this Environmental Assessment or the associated proposed rule may be obtained from the Chief of the Division of Consultation, Habitat Conservation Planning, Recovery, and State Grants, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 420, Arlington, Virginia 22203, or the Chief of the Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

Comments or materials concerning the Environmental Assessment or the associated proposed rule should be sent to the Chief, Division of Consultation,

Habitat Conservation Planning, Recovery and State Grants, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 420, Arlington, Virginia 22203. Comments can also be accepted if submitted via e-mail to [healthyforests@fws.gov](mailto:healthyforests@fws.gov). Comments and materials received in conjunction with this rulemaking will be available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Patrick Leonard, Chief, Division of Consultation, Habitat Conservation Planning, Recovery and State Grants, at the above address (Telephone 703/358-2171, Facsimile 703/358-1735) or Phil Williams, Chief, Endangered Species Division, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301/713-1401; facsimile 301/713-0376).

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### Background

In response to several years of catastrophic wildland fires throughout the United States culminating in the particularly severe fire season of 2000, when over 6.5 million acres of wildland areas burned, President Clinton directed the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to develop a report outlining a new approach to managing wildland fires and restoring fire-adapted ecosystems. The report, entitled *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*, was issued September 8, 2000. This report set forth ways to reduce the impacts of fires on rural communities, a short-term plan for rehabilitation of fire-damaged ecosystems, and ways to limit the introduction of invasive species and address natural restoration processes. The report, and the accompanying budget requests, strategies, plans, and direction, have become known as the NFP. The NFP is intended to reduce risk to communities and natural resources from wildland fires through rehabilitation, restoration and maintenance of fire-adapted ecosystems, and by the reduction of accumulated fuels or highly combustible fuels on forests, woodlands, grasslands, and rangelands.

In August 2002, during another severe wildland fire season in which over 7.1 million acres of wildlands burned, President Bush announced the Healthy Forests Initiative. The initiative was intended to accelerate implementation of the fuels reduction and ecosystem restoration goals of the NFP in order to minimize the damage caused by catastrophic wildfires by reducing unnecessary regulatory obstacles that