

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

[Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040;
4500030113]

RIN 1018-AZ79

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor* and *Varronia rupicola*

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule; reopening of comment period.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announce the reopening of the public comment period on the October 22, 2013, proposed designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana* (no common name), *Gonocalyx concolor* (no common name), and *Varronia rupicola* (no common name) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). We also announce the availability of a draft economic analysis (DEA) of the proposed designation of critical habitat for these species and an amended required determinations section of the proposal. We are reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties an opportunity to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule, the associated DEA, and the amended required determinations section. Comments previously submitted need not be resubmitted, as they will be fully considered in preparation of the final rule.

DATES: We will consider comments received or postmarked on or before June 20, 2014. Comments submitted electronically using the Federal eRulemaking Portal (see **ADDRESSES** section, below) must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date.

ADDRESSES:

Document availability: You may obtain copies of the proposed rule and associated documents on the internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040 or by mail from the Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

Written Comments: You may submit written comments by one of the following methods:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Submit comments

on the critical habitat proposal and associated draft economic analysis by searching for Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040, which is the docket number for this rulemaking.

(2) *By hard copy:* Submit comments on the critical habitat proposal and associated DEA by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

We request that you send comments only by the methods described above. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us (see the Public Comments section below for more information).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Marelisa Rivera, Deputy Field Supervisor, Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office, P.O. Box 491, Road 301 Km. 5.1, Boquerón, Puerto Rico 00622; by telephone (787-851-7297), or by facsimile (787-851-7440). Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Public Comments

We will accept written comments and information during this reopened comment period on our proposed designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* that was published in the **Federal Register** on October 22, 2013 (78 FR 62529), our DEA of the proposed designation, and the amended required determinations provided in this document. We will consider information and recommendations from all interested parties. We are particularly interested in comments concerning:

(1) The reasons why we should or should not designate habitat as “critical habitat” under section 4 of the Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), including whether there are threats to the species from human activity, the degree of which can be expected to increase due to the designation, and whether that increase in threat outweighs the benefit of designation such that the designation of critical habitat is not prudent.

(2) Specific information on:

(a) The amount and distribution of *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* (which we refer to collectively as the three Caribbean plants) and their habitat;

(b) What areas occupied by the species at the time of listing that contain features essential for the conservation of the species we should include in the designation and why;

(c) Special management considerations or protection that may be needed in critical habitat areas we are proposing, including managing for the potential effects of climate change; and

(d) What areas not occupied at the time of listing are essential to the conservation of the species and why.

(3) Land use designations and current or planned activities in the subject areas and their probable impacts on proposed critical habitat.

(4) Information on the projected and reasonably likely impacts of climate change on the three Caribbean plants and proposed critical habitat.

(5) Any foreseeable economic, national security, or other relevant impacts of designating any area that may be included in the final designation. We are particularly interested in any impacts on small entities, and the benefits of including or excluding areas from the proposed designation that are subject to these impacts.

(6) Information on the extent to which the description of economic impacts in the DEA is a reasonable estimate of the likely economic impacts.

(7) The likelihood of adverse social reactions to the designation of critical habitat, as discussed in the associated documents of the DEA, and how the consequences of such reactions, if likely to occur, would relate to the conservation and regulatory benefits of the proposed critical habitat designation.

(8) Whether any areas we are proposing for critical habitat designation should be considered for exclusion under section 4(b)(2) of the Act, and whether the benefits of potentially excluding any specific area outweigh the benefits of including that area under section 4(b)(2) of the Act.

(9) Whether we could improve or modify our approach to designating critical habitat in any way to provide for greater public participation and understanding, or to better accommodate public concerns and comments.

If you submitted comments or information on the proposed rule (78 FR 62529) during the initial comment period from October 22, 2013, to December 23, 2013, please do not resubmit them. We will incorporate them into the public record as part of this comment period, and we will fully consider them in the preparation of our final determination. Our final

determination concerning revised critical habitat will take into consideration all written comments and any additional information we receive during both comment periods. On the basis of public comments, we may, during the development of our final determination, find that areas proposed are not essential, are appropriate for exclusion under section 4(b)(2) of the Act, or are not appropriate for exclusion.

You may submit your comments and materials concerning the proposed rule or DEA by one of the methods listed in **ADDRESSES**. We request that you send comments only by the methods described in **ADDRESSES**.

If you submit a comment via <http://www.regulations.gov>, your entire comment—including any personal identifying information—will be posted on the Web site. We will post all hardcopy comments on <http://www.regulations.gov> as well. If you submit a hardcopy comment that includes personal identifying information, you may request at the top of your document that we withhold this information from public review. However, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation we used in preparing the proposed rule and DEA, will be available for public inspection on <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040, or by appointment, during normal business hours, at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**). You may obtain copies of the proposed rule and the DEA on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2013-0040, or by mail from the Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section).

Background

It is our intent to discuss only those topics directly relevant to the designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* in this document. For more information on previous Federal actions concerning the three Caribbean plants, refer to the proposed designation of critical habitat published in the **Federal Register** on October 22, 2013 (78 FR 62529). For more information on the three Caribbean plants or its habitat, refer to the proposed listing rule published in the **Federal Register** on October 22, 2013 (78 FR 62560), which is available online at [http://](http://www.regulations.gov)

www.regulations.gov (at Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2013-0103) or from the Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**).

Previous Federal Actions

On October 22, 2013, we published a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* (78 FR 62529). Specifically, we proposed to designate approximately:

- 20.5 hectares (ha) (50.6 acres (ac)) in 6 units as critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana* in St. Croix, USVI.
- 80.1 ha (198 ac) in 2 units as critical habitat for *Gonocalyx concolor* in Puerto Rico.
- 2,648 ha (6,548 ac) in 7 units as critical habitat for *Varronia rupicola* in Puerto Rico and Vieques Island.

That proposal had a 60-day comment period, ending December 23, 2013.

Critical Habitat

Section 3 of the Act defines critical habitat as the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by a species, at the time it is listed in accordance with the Act, on which are found those physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protection, and specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by a species at the time it is listed, upon a determination that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species. If the proposed rule is made final, section 7 of the Act will prohibit destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat by any activity funded, authorized, or carried out by any Federal agency. Federal agencies proposing actions affecting critical habitat must consult with us on the effects of their proposed actions, under section 7(a)(2) of the Act.

Consideration of Impacts Under Section 4(b)(2) of the Act

Section 4(b)(2) of the Act requires that we designate critical habitat based upon the best scientific data available, after taking into consideration the economic impact, impact on national security, or any other relevant impact of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. We may exclude an area from critical habitat if we determine that the benefits of excluding the area outweigh the benefits of including the area as critical habitat, provided such exclusion will not result in the extinction of the species.

When considering the benefits of inclusion for an area, we consider, among other factors, the additional

regulatory benefits that an area would receive through the analysis under section 7 of the Act addressing the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat as a result of actions with a Federal nexus (activities conducted, funded, permitted, or authorized by Federal agencies), the educational benefits of identifying areas containing essential features that aid in the recovery of the listed species, and any ancillary benefits triggered by existing local, State, or Federal laws as a result of the critical habitat designation.

When considering the benefits of exclusion, we consider, among other things, whether exclusion of a specific area is likely to incentivize or result in conservation; the continuation, strengthening, or encouragement of partnerships; or implementation of a management plan. In the case of *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola*, the benefits of critical habitat include public awareness of the presence of the three Caribbean plants and the importance of habitat protection, and, where a Federal nexus exists, increased habitat protection for the three Caribbean plants due to protection from adverse modification or destruction of critical habitat. In practice, situations with a Federal nexus exist primarily on Federal lands or for projects undertaken by Federal agencies.

We have not proposed to exclude any areas from critical habitat. However, the final decision on whether to exclude any areas will be based on the best scientific data available at the time of the final designation, including information obtained during the comment period and information about the economic impact of designation. Accordingly, we have prepared the DEA, which is available for review and comment (see **ADDRESSES**).

Consideration of Economic Impacts

Section 4(b)(2) of the Act and its implementing regulations require that we consider the economic impact that may result from a designation of critical habitat. To assess the probable economic impacts of a designation, we must first evaluate specific land uses or activities and projects that may occur in the area of the critical habitat. We then must evaluate the impacts that a specific critical habitat designation may have on restricting or modifying specific land uses or activities for the benefit of the species and its habitat within the areas proposed. We then identify which conservation efforts may be the result of the species being listed under the Act versus those attributed solely to the designation of critical habitat for this particular species. The probable

economic impact of a proposed critical habitat designation is analyzed by comparing scenarios “with critical habitat” and “without critical habitat.”

The “without critical habitat” scenario represents the baseline for the analysis, which includes the existing regulatory and socio-economic burden imposed on landowners, managers, or other resource users potentially affected by the designation of critical habitat (e.g., under the Federal listing as well as other Federal, State, and local regulations). The baseline, therefore, represents the costs of all efforts attributable to the listing of the species under the Act (i.e., conservation of the species and its habitat incurred regardless of whether critical habitat is designated). The “with critical habitat” scenario describes the incremental impacts associated specifically with the designation of critical habitat for the species. The incremental conservation efforts and associated impacts would not be expected without the designation of critical habitat for the species. In other words, the incremental costs are those attributable solely to the designation of critical habitat, above and beyond the baseline costs. These are the costs we use when evaluating the benefits of inclusion and exclusion of particular areas from the final designation of critical habitat should we choose to conduct an optional 4(b)(2) exclusion analysis.

For this designation, we developed an Incremental Effects Memorandum (IEM) considering the probable incremental economic impacts that may result from this proposed designation of critical habitat. The information contained in our IEM was then used to develop a screening analysis of the probable effects of the designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* (IEC 2014, entire). We began by conducting a screening analysis of the proposed designation of critical habitat in order to focus our analysis on the key factors that are likely to result in incremental economic impacts. The purpose of the screening analysis is to filter out the geographic areas in which the critical habitat designation is unlikely to result in probable incremental economic impacts. In particular, the screening analysis considers baseline costs (i.e., absent critical habitat designation) and includes probable economic impacts where land and water use may be subject to conservation plans, land management plans, best management practices, or regulations that protect the habitat area as a result of the Federal listing status of the species. The screening analysis filters out particular

areas of critical habitat that are already subject to such protections and are, therefore, unlikely to incur incremental economic impacts. The screening analysis also assesses whether units are unoccupied by the species and may require additional management or conservation efforts as a result of the critical habitat designation and may incur incremental economic impacts. This screening analysis combined with the information contained in our IEM is our draft economic analysis (DEA) of the proposed critical habitat designation for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* and is summarized in the narrative below.

Executive Orders 12866 and 13563 direct Federal agencies to assess the costs and benefits of available regulatory alternatives in quantitative (to the extent feasible) and qualitative terms. Consistent with the E.O. regulatory analysis requirements, our effects analysis under the Act may take into consideration impacts to both directly and indirectly impacted entities, where practicable and reasonable. We assess, to the extent practicable and if sufficient data are available, the probable impacts to both directly and indirectly impacted entities. As part of our screening analysis, we considered the types of economic activities that are likely to occur within the areas likely affected by the critical habitat designation. In our IEM, first we identified the probable incremental economic impacts associated with the following categories of activities: (1) Commercial or residential developments; (2) permits required when an activity results in the discharge of dredge or fill material into the waters of the United States; (3) removal of unexploded ordnance that involves vegetation removal; (4) restoration of coastal habitat; (5) control of invasive species; and (6) creation of new trails. We considered each industry or category individually. Additionally, we considered whether their activities have any Federal involvement. Critical habitat designation will not affect activities that do not have any Federal involvement, but only activities conducted, funded, permitted, or authorized by Federal agencies. In areas where *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* are present, Federal agencies already are required to consult with the Service under section 7 of the Act on activities they fund, permit, or implement that may affect the species. If we finalize this proposed critical habitat designation, consultations to avoid the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat

would be incorporated into the existing consultation process.

In our IEM, we attempted to distinguish between the effects that will result from the species being listed and those attributable to the critical habitat designation (i.e., the difference between the jeopardy and adverse modification standards) for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola*'s critical habitat. Because the designation of critical habitat for three Caribbean plants was proposed concurrently with the listing, it has been our experience that it is more difficult to discern which conservation efforts are attributable to the species being listed and those which will result solely from the designation of critical habitat. However, the following specific circumstances in this case help to inform our evaluation: (1) The essential physical and biological features identified for critical habitat are the same features essential for the life requisites of the species and (2) any actions that would result in sufficient harm or harassment to constitute jeopardy to *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* would also likely adversely affect the essential physical and biological features of critical habitat. The IEM outlines our rationale concerning this limited distinction between baseline conservation efforts and incremental impacts of the designation of critical habitat for this species.

The proposed critical habitat designation for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* totals approximately 2,748 ha (6795.6 ac) in 15 units. Of the 15 units, 11 are considered occupied (4 units for *A. eggersiana*, 2 units for *G. concolor*, and 5 units for *V. rupicola*). The proposed critical habitat designation includes lands under Federal (7.4 percent), U.S. Virgin Islands Territory (St. Croix, 0.3 percent), Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (30 percent), and private (62 percent) land ownership. All of the Federal lands are part of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge.

In the occupied areas (93 percent), any actions that may affect designated critical habitat would also affect the species, and it is unlikely that any additional conservation efforts would be recommended to address the adverse modification standard over and above those recommended as necessary to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of *A. eggersiana*, *G. concolor*, and *V. rupicola*. Therefore, only administrative costs are expected in approximately 93 percent of the proposed critical habitat designation.

While this additional analysis will require time and resources by both the Federal action agency and the Service, it is believed that, in most circumstances, these costs would predominantly be administrative in nature and would not be significant.

The entities most likely to incur incremental costs are parties to section 7 consultations, including Federal action agencies and, in some cases, third parties, most frequently State agencies or municipalities. Activities we expect will be subject to consultations that may involve private entities as third parties are residential and commercial development that may occur on private lands. However, based on coordination efforts with State and local agencies, the cost to private entities within these sectors is expected to be relatively minor (administrative costs from \$400 to \$9,000 per consultation effort).

The remaining 7 percent of the total proposed critical habitat designation is currently unoccupied habitat (two units for *A. eggersiana* and two units for *V. rupicola*) but is essential for the conservation of the species. In these unoccupied areas, any conservation efforts or associated probable impacts would be considered incremental effects attributed to the critical habitat designation. However, these unoccupied areas are already managed for conservation purposes, so few actions are expected to occur that will require section 7 consultation or associated project modifications for protection of critical habitat. In particular, consultations in these areas are anticipated to be associated with restoration of coastal habitat, minimization of trail creation and expansion, and invasive species control. Because the unoccupied areas are already set aside for conservation purposes, these anticipated activities are expected to be generally consistent with the needs of the species. Modifications to accommodate the three plants are expected to be relatively small and are unlikely to exceed \$100 million in any single year.

The probable incremental economic impacts of critical habitat designation for *A. eggersiana*, *G. concolor*, and *V. rupicola* are expected to be limited to additional administrative effort as well as minor costs of conservation efforts resulting from a small number of future section 7 consultations. This is due to two factors: (1) A large portion of proposed critical habitat area is occupied by the species (93 percent), and incremental economic impacts of critical habitat designation, other than administrative costs, are unlikely; and (2) in proposed areas that are not

occupied by the three Caribbean plants (7 percent), few actions are anticipated that will result in section 7 consultation or associated project modifications. At approximately \$400 to \$9,000 per consultation, in order to reach the threshold of \$100 million of incremental administrative impacts in a single year, annual critical habitat designation would have to result in more than 12,000 consultations in a single year. Based on past consultation history alone, this is highly unlikely. Therefore, future probable incremental economic impacts are not likely to exceed \$100 million in any single year.

Required Determinations—Amended

In our October 22, 2013, proposed rule (78FR62529), we indicated that we would defer our determination of compliance with several statutes and executive orders until we had evaluated the probable effects on landowners and stakeholders and the resulting probable economic impacts of the designation. Following our evaluation of the probable incremental economic impacts resulting from the designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola*, we have amended or affirmed our determinations below. Specifically, we affirm the information in our proposed rule concerning Executive Order (E.O.) 12866 (Regulatory Planning and Review), E.O. 12630 (Takings), E.O. 13132 (Federalism), E.O. 12988 (Civil Justice Reform), E.O. 13211 (Energy, Supply, Distribution, and Use), the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (2 U.S.C. 1501 *et seq.*), the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*), the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), and the President's memorandum of April 29, 1994, "Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments" (59 FR 22951). However, based on our evaluation of the probable incremental economic impacts of the proposed designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola*, we are amending our required determination concerning the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*) and Takings (E.O. 12630).

Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*)

Under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA; 5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*), as amended by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 (SBREFA; 5 U.S.C. 801 *et seq.*), whenever an agency is required to publish a notice of rulemaking for any proposed or final rule, it must prepare

and make available for public comment a regulatory flexibility analysis that describes the effects of the rule on small entities (i.e., small businesses, small organizations, and small government jurisdictions). However, no regulatory flexibility analysis is required if the head of the agency certifies the rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The SBREFA amended the RFA to require Federal agencies to provide a certification statement of the factual basis for certifying that the rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

According to the Small Business Administration, small entities include small organizations such as independent nonprofit organizations; small governmental jurisdictions, including school boards and city and town governments that serve fewer than 50,000 residents; and small businesses (13 CFR 121.201). Small businesses include manufacturing and mining concerns with fewer than 500 employees, wholesale trade entities with fewer than 100 employees, retail and service businesses with less than \$5 million in annual sales, general and heavy construction businesses with less than \$27.5 million in annual business, special trade contractors doing less than \$11.5 million in annual business, and agricultural businesses with annual sales less than \$750,000. To determine if potential economic impacts to these small entities are significant, we considered the types of activities that might trigger regulatory impacts under this designation as well as types of project modifications that may result. In general, the term "significant economic impact" is meant to apply to a typical small business firm's business operations.

The Service's current understanding of the requirements under the RFA, as amended, and following recent court decisions, is that Federal agencies are only required to evaluate the potential incremental impacts of rulemaking on those entities directly regulated by the rulemaking itself and, therefore, are not required to evaluate the potential impacts to indirectly regulated entities. The regulatory mechanism through which critical habitat protections are realized is section 7 of the Act, which requires Federal agencies, in consultation with the Service, to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by the Agency is not likely to adversely modify critical habitat. Therefore, under these circumstances only Federal action agencies are directly subject to the specific regulatory requirement (avoiding destruction and

adverse modification) imposed by critical habitat designation. Accordingly, our position is that only Federal action agencies will be directly regulated by this designation. Federal agencies are not small entities, and, to this end, there is no requirement under RFA to evaluate the potential impacts to entities not directly regulated. Therefore, because no small entities are directly regulated by this rulemaking, the Service certifies that, if promulgated, the proposed critical habitat designation will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

In summary, we have considered whether the proposed designation would result in a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. For the above reasons and based on currently available information, we certify that, if promulgated, the proposed critical habitat designation would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small business entities. Therefore, an initial regulatory flexibility analysis is not required.

E.O. 12630 (Takings)

In accordance with E.O. 12630 (Government Actions and Interference with Constitutionally Protected Private Property Rights), we have analyzed the potential takings implications of designating critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* in a takings implications assessment. As discussed above, the designation of critical habitat affects only Federal actions. Although private parties that receive Federal funding or assistance, or require approval or authorization from a Federal agency for an action may be indirectly impacted by the designation of critical habitat, the legally binding duty to avoid destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat rests squarely on the Federal agency. The DEA found that no significant economic impacts are likely to result from the designation of critical habitat for *Agave eggersiana*, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola*. Because the Act's critical habitat protection requirements apply only to Federal agency actions, few conflicts between critical habitat and private property rights should result from this designation. Based on information contained in the DEA and described within this document, it is not likely that economic impacts to a property owner would be of a sufficient magnitude to support a takings action. Therefore, the takings implications assessment concludes that this designation of critical habitat for *Agave*

eggersiana, *Gonocalyx concolor*, and *Varronia rupicola* does not pose significant takings implications for lands within or affected by the designation.

Authors

The primary authors of this notice are the staff members of the Caribbean Ecological Service Field Office, Southeast Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: May 9, 2014.

Michael J. Bean,

Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

[FR Doc. 2014-11731 Filed 5-20-14; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 140220160-4160-01]

RIN 0648-BD99

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Northeast Skate Complex Fishery; Framework Adjustment 2

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

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This rule proposes regulations to approve and implement measures in Framework Adjustment 2 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The proposed action was developed by the New England Fishery Management Council to set specifications for the skate fisheries for the 2014 and 2015 fishing years, including a reduced annual catch limit and total allowable landings. Framework 2 would also modify reporting requirements for skate fishing vessels and seafood dealers to improve species-specific data collection. The action is necessary to update the Skate FMP to be consistent with the best available scientific information, and improve management of the skate fisheries. The proposed action is expected to help conserve skate stocks, while maintaining economic opportunities for the skate fisheries.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before June 20, 2014.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the framework, including the Environmental Impact Assessment and Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR) and other supporting documents for the action are available from Thomas A. Nies, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950. The framework is also accessible via the Internet at: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>.

You may submit comments, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2014-0037, by any one of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking portal. Go to www.regulations.gov#!/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0037, click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Mail:** NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Mark the outside of the envelope "Comments on Skate Framework 2."

Instructions: Comments must be submitted by one of the above methods to ensure that the comments are received, documented, and considered by NMFS. Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address) submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word or Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tobey Curtis, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 281-9273.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The New England Fishery Management Council is responsible for developing management measures for skate fisheries in the northeastern U.S. through the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (Skate FMP). Seven skate species are managed under the Skate FMP: Winter; little; thorny;