



Midwest Wind Energy Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan Scoping for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement *Questions and Answers*

1. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing a draft environmental impact statement (EIS), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to evaluate alternatives relating to Endangered Species Act incidental take permits that the Service may issue under the Midwest Wind Energy Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. We are in the scoping phase of the NEPA process as we begin preparation of the EIS. Therefore, we published a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement in the June 12, 2015, *Federal Register*. The purpose of the Notice of Intent is to let interested parties and the public know that we would like to receive input, suggestions and information on the scope of the EIS. The Notice of Intent opens a 60-day public comment period that will close on August 11, 2015.

The following questions and answers summarize the habitat conservation planning process and the Midwest Wind Energy Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan proposal, describe the NEPA process, and outline ways in which the public can participate in the preparation of the EIS.

2. What is a Habitat Conservation Plan?

Section 9 of the Endangered Species Act prohibits the "take" of listed wildlife species through direct harm or habitat destruction. However, the Act also allows the Service to issue permits for the "incidental" take of endangered and threatened wildlife. Permit holders can proceed with an activity that is legal in all other respects, but that may incidentally take listed wildlife.

To receive a permit, applicants must design, implement and secure funding for a conservation plan that avoids, minimizes and mitigates harm to wildlife impacted by their activity. That plan is commonly called a habitat conservation plan, or HCP. HCPs are legally binding agreements between the Secretary of the Interior and the permit holder.

3. What is the Midwest Wind Energy Multi-Species HCP?

The *Midwest Wind Energy Multi-Species HCP* (multi-species HCP) is being prepared by the Midwest Region of the Service and their planning partners for wind energy development within an eight-state *plan area* encompassing the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. Activities covered under the multi-species HCP include construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of existing and future wind energy facilities within limited portions of the plan area, and monitoring activities and management of compensatory mitigation lands. These activities are referred to as *covered activities*. The multi-species HCP addresses incidental take of six federally-listed bat and bird species, one bat species that may be listed in the future, and the bald eagle. These species are referred to as *covered species*. Additional information on plan area, covered activities, and covered species is provided below.

4. Who are the Service's planning partners for this multi-species HCP?

The planning partners include state conservation agencies from seven of the eight states within the plan area, as well as the American Wind Energy Association and The Conservation Fund. The American Wind Energy Association represents a consortium of wind energy companies. The Conservation Fund is a non-profit organization that helps plan mitigation and manages mitigation funds.

5. What species are covered by the multi-species HCP?

The multi-species HCP addresses incidental take of eight species that could be affected by wind energy activities (referred to as *covered species*). Six of the covered species are listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, including Kirtland's warbler, least tern (interior population), piping plover (Great Lakes and Northern Great Plains populations), Indiana bat, and northern long-eared bat. One of the covered species, little brown bat, is not currently listed under the Endangered Species Act but may be listed in the future. Bald eagle, which is protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, is also a covered species.

6. What geographic area is covered by the multi-species HCP proposal?

The geographic area covered by the multi-species HCP is referred to as the *plan area* and encompasses all lands within the Midwest Region of the Service, which includes eight states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.

However, incidental take of covered species would only be allowed within a subset of the plan area, referred to as the *covered lands*. We developed covered lands in response to public comment on the multi-species HCP and specifically excluded lands that are within:

- 20 miles of sensitive bat hibernacula identified by the Service and state wildlife agencies
- 3 miles of the shores of the Great Lakes
- 1 mile of the edges of rivers supporting bird migration corridors and/or concentrations of wintering waterfowl
- Floodplain areas along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers
- High bat concentration areas in southern Indiana
- Bird migratory areas in Illinois and around large lakes in Minnesota

Wind energy projects are not precluded outside of covered lands, but those projects would not be eligible for participation in this multi-species HCP.

Mitigation measures under the multi-species HCP (e.g., habitat protection and restoration) may occur throughout the plan area, as appropriate to conserve covered species.

6. What activities would the Service issue an incidental take permit for under the multi-species HCP?

The planning partners have requested incidental take authorization for the following activities, referred to as covered activities.

- Construction, operation, maintenance and repair, decommissioning and reclamation, and repowering of commercial multi-turbine wind energy projects within covered lands. This includes both existing commercial multi-turbine wind facilities and potential new wind development projects.
- Management of compensatory mitigation lands, designed to offset the effects of covered activities on covered species.
- Monitoring, including site, design, and construction monitoring, operations monitoring, mitigation monitoring and effectiveness monitoring.

The multi-species HCP also includes general and species-specific avoidance and minimization measures to reduce the effects of covered activities on covered species.

7. What permit term is the Service considering under the multi-species HCP?

The proposed permit term is 45-years. During the first 15 years, proposed and existing commercial wind energy projects may apply for and receive take authorizations under the multi-species HCP. Take authorizations would generally last 30 years from the time the project commences (for new facilities) or from the time a permit is issued (for existing facilities).

8. What is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)?

NEPA is a federal law that serves as the nation’s basic charter for making major federal decisions and determining how those decisions affect the human environment. NEPA requires that all federal agencies consider the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions. NEPA promotes better agency decision-making by ensuring that the best available information is provided to agency officials and the public before the agency decides whether and how to undertake a major federal action. Through the NEPA process, the public has an opportunity to learn about proposed federal actions and to provide timely information and comments.

An HCP is a planning document required as part of an application for an Endangered Species Act incidental take permit. Issuance of the permit by the Service is a federal action subject to review under NEPA.

9. Why is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) needed?

NEPA requires federal agencies to consider and disclose the environmental impacts of their proposed actions. Due to the scope of this project, the Service determined that an EIS should be prepared to analyze the potential effects of the proposed federal action and alternatives to that proposed action. The analysis provided in the EIS will be used to inform the Service’s decision on whether or not to issue incidental take permits under the multi-species HCP.

10. Where are we in the NEPA process?

The Service is in the scoping phase of the NEPA process, which is the first step in preparing an EIS. The purpose of scoping is to ask for early input from the public, other concerned government agencies, the scientific community, Tribes, industry and other interested parties. We want to hear from others about what resource areas, topics and alternatives they would like evaluated in the EIS, as well as suggestions on data or information that should be considered in

the EIS analysis. During the scoping period, you can learn about the proposed action and the EIS process, attend one of eight public meetings and talk with representatives of the Service, participate in an online webinar, and provide written comments on the scope and approach for completing the EIS.

11. When is scoping and what type of input does the Service need?

The scoping period for this EIS is 60 days, from June 12, 2015 to August 11, 2015, during which time a public comment period is open. Comments should be postmarked by August 11, 2015, to be considered in the Draft EIS.

During the scoping period, the Service requests your comments on the scope of the EIS, including the following topics:

- Scope of the EIS analysis – Specific topics or resources (e.g., water quality, traffic) that should be considered in the EIS
- Alternatives – Alternatives to the proposed action that should be evaluated in the EIS
- Data or information – Suggestions on data or information that should be considered in the EIS

Comments may be submitted using one of the following methods:

- Hard Copy – Submitted by U.S. Mail:
Regional Director, Attn: Rick Amidon
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458
- Electronically: Visit the Federal eRulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov. In the search box enter (Docket Number FWS-R3-ES-2015-0033).

12. Where are public scoping meetings being held?

Eight public scoping meetings will be held to allow the public the opportunity to talk with representatives of the Service, learn more about the process, and provide written comments. The meetings will be held at the following dates and locations:

Date and Time	Location	Date and Time	Location
Monday July 13, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Elliot Recreation Center 1000 E 14 th Street Minneapolis, MN	Monday July 20, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Letts Community Center Gymnasium 1220 W. Kalamazoo St. Lansing, MI
Tuesday July 14, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Warner Park Community Recreation Center 1625 Northport Dr. Madison, WI	Tuesday July 21, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Columbus Downtown High School Commons 364 South 4 th St. Columbus, OH

Date and Time	Location	Date and Time	Location
Wednesday July 15, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Iowa State University Memorial Union, Campanile Room 2229 Lincoln Way Ames, IA	Wednesday July 22, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	World Sports Park Ballroom 1313 South Post Rd Indianapolis, IN
Thursday July 16, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Battle High School Commons 7575 East St. Charles Rd. Columbia, MO	Thursday July 23, 2015 5 to 7 p.m.	Illinois Wesleyan University Memorial Center Young Main Lounge 104 E. University Ave Bloomington, IL

Additionally, an online webinar will be held on July 28, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. EST (1:00 p.m. CST). Visit the project website at <http://www.midwestwindenergyhcpeis.org> for information on how to attend the online webinar.

13. What are the Next Steps?

After the scoping period closes, the Service will prepare a draft EIS that evaluates the effects of the multi-species HCP and any alternatives identified during scoping. A second opportunity for public comment will be provided when the draft EIS is completed. The Service anticipates a Draft EIS will be ready for public review in the spring of 2016.

For more information about the Midwest Wind Multi-Species HCP and the NEPA process, contact Rick Amidon at the mailing address provided above, or by phone at (612) 713-5164. You can also visit the Service-sponsored project website at <http://www.midwestwindenergyhcpeis.org>.