

[FR Doc. 96-1790 Filed 1-30-96; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 4210-13-P-M

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Acquisition of Lands for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area as a Unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System in Western Minnesota and Northwestern Iowa

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intends to gather information necessary to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the acquisition of lands for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area in Minnesota and Iowa. Public meetings will be held with dates, times, and locations published through the local media in advance.

This notice is being furnished as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (40 CFR 1501.7) to obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS from other agencies, organizations and the general public. Comments and participation in this scoping process are hereby requested.

DATES: Written comments should be received by March 18, 1996. Public meetings will be held at widely scattered locations throughout the area of consideration in Minnesota and Iowa. Meeting dates are to be determined for February and March 1996 and will be announced through the media.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Howard A. Lipke, Project Manager, Northern Tallgrass Prairie Project, c/o Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge, Route 1 Box 32, Audubon, MN 56511; Telephone 218/439-6319.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Service proposes to permanently protect 77,000 acres, more or less, of native prairie lands and buffer lands at widespread locations in western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa for management as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The project area encompasses 48 counties of Minnesota and 37 counties of Iowa from the Canadian border to near Des Moines, Iowa. Land would be acquired from willing sellers through fee title,

easement, lease, or other property management rights transfer arrangements. The project would involve less than one percent of the presettlement prairie uplands with associated wetlands within this 150 mile wide by 520 mile long area even if the entire remaining prairie acreage were to be acquired.

Purpose of Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to help achieve resource responsibilities, as stated in the Service's mission statement, through conserving, protecting and enhancing Minnesota and Iowa tallgrass prairie lands for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and their habitats and to provide for compatible public use.

Need for Action

The action is proposed to meet Service stewardship mandates and trust responsibilities for threatened and endangered species, migratory birds and interjurisdictional fish. A fourth trust responsibility, Service-owned lands, would be enhanced as project lands complement and buffer existing refuge and Waterfowl Production Area lands. Conversion to cropland and grazing land, drainage, and other development has resulted in the loss of more than 99 percent of the 25 million acres of original tallgrass prairie. Today, only 320,000 acres remain in Minnesota and Iowa, much of it in a degraded condition. Consequently, native fish, wildlife and vegetative resources dependent upon the prairie and associated wetlands have declined dramatically. Acquisition of land or other property rights along with habitat restoration would benefit a diversity of fish and wildlife resources, including native lake and river fishes; mammals; birds such as waterfowl, shorebirds, and passerine birds; and would help in the recovery of Federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

Related Actions of Other Agencies

Acquisition of lands and interests therein under existing Service authorities would complement other prairie land acquisition being done within this northern region of the tallgrass prairie by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa County Conservation Boards, and The Nature Conservancy. Dependent upon respective agency and organization missions and goals, each effort is made to conserve remnants of the native prairie to save a part of the natural and cultural heritage of this once vast prairie area. Some efforts conserve, restore and

enhance prairie wildlife and plant communities for compatible public enjoyment and educational uses.

Alternatives

Alternatives for the Service to pursue protecting and enhancing the Tallgrass Prairie ecosystem to benefit fish and wildlife and their habitats include: (1) Acquiring appropriate ownership interest to prairie lands and managing those lands as Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area—a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, (2) non-acquisition methods, such as private lands initiatives or providing public information to landowners, (3) non-acquisition by the Service, promoting other agency and organization acquisition, and (4) no action.

These alternatives, along with others identified during the scoping process, may or may not be examined in detail in the EIS.

Issue

The following would likely be issues under the Service's proposed action: (1) Land use: Cultivated cropland uses would mostly cease. Grazing and haying agricultural uses would be restricted. Gravel mining would not occur. Prairie with associated riparian and wetland habitat, and areas available for outdoor recreation, would increase. Acquired lands would no longer be available to others for purchase. New or expanded transportation, drainage and utility systems across project land could be authorized through Service issuance of right-of-way permits. (2) Fish and wildlife: Prairie-dependent wildlife need important plants and plant communities preserved as unique habitats, assuring their continued existence. Numbers and diversity of fish and wildlife including Federally-listed threatened and endangered species would increase. Likelihood of the need to list threatened and endangered species from State and Federal candidate lists would be reduced. (3) Economics: Economic returns from cultivated cropland use would cease. Economic returns from haying and grazing would be reduced. There could be a shift of local business opportunities toward visitor services. Economic returns from outdoor recreation would likely increase. (4) Water and wetlands: Agricultural drainage across project lands could continue under previously established, recorded or prescriptive rights. Natural wetlands and riparian areas associated with prairie would remain. Water quality (surface and underground supplies), as a leading environmental issue, could be

improved. Wellhead protection for city/town domestic water supplies could be protected, even enhanced. (5) Tax revenues: Service fee title lands would be removed from county tax rolls resulting in tax revenue losses—could be offset by payments through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act, and tax shortfall and offset provisions. Prairie tax credit or exemption could place added burden upon local governments. (6) Recreation: Opportunity would exist to balance consumptive and non-consumptive recreational uses—increased recreation would occur. Historical and cultural sites and values would be important prairie values to protect. (7) Other: Approach to acquisition relative to use of condemnation, concern that landowners would not receive just-compensation, and widespread fee purchase and government ownership could be perceived as a loss of local control. Concern of project size and cost to the taxpayer in relation to other priorities. Impact upon other programs and uncertainty as to how the project is to be integrated with other program efforts and lands currently protected.

Other Information

The environmental review of this proposal will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4371 *et seq.*), NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), other appropriate Federal regulations, and Service procedures for compliance with those regulations.

We estimate the Draft EIS will be available for public review by summer 1996.

Dated: January 23, 1996.

Marvin E. Moriarty,
Acting Regional Director.

[FR Doc. 96-1872 Filed 1-30-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-M

Bureau of Land Management

[NM-930-06-1020-00]

Notice of Intent To Develop Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management in New Mexico, Modify Land Use Plans, and Prepare National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Analysis Pursuant to the Planning Regulations (43 CFR Part 1600)

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in New Mexico

intends to develop statewide Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management as provided in the BLM's new grazing regulations (43 CFR Part 4100) and modify all existing Land Use Plans (LUP) in the State. The appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis will be prepared in accordance with the Planning Regulations (43 CFR Part 1600) for the adoption of statewide Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management. This notice invites public input on the development of Standards and Guidelines for New Mexico, on issues to be addressed and on alternatives to be considered in the NEPA analysis.

DATES: Comments will be accepted throughout the process or until further notice. Public comment periods specifically for the plan modification and NEPA process will be provided later.

ADDRESSES: Any comments or requests to be placed on the mailing list should be sent to Rangeland Health Project (93100), Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 27155, Santa Fe, NM, 87502.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: J.W. Whitney at (505) 438-7438.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The BLM's new grazing administration regulations (43 CFR Part 4100), which became effective August 21, 1995, provide for the development of state Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management. These Standards and Guidelines are to be approved through BLM planning and NEPA processes. Incorporating Standards and Guidelines into existing plans will require some form of plan modification, ranging from plan maintenance to plan amendment. All LUPs for public lands in the State of New Mexico may be affected. At this point in time, it is undecided what level of plan modification (maintenance or amendment) and NEPA analysis (Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement) will be needed.

The NEPA analysis will be conducted using an interdisciplinary team of specialists.

Description of Possible Alternatives

At this time three preliminary alternatives have been identified: the continuation of current management as provided for in existing LUPs (no action alternative); the application of fall-back Standards and Guidelines contained in the Grazing Regulations (43 CFR Part 4100); and the adoption of Standards and Guidelines developed locally and in

consultation with New Mexico's Resource Advisory Council.

Anticipated Issues

Anticipated issues to be addressed during the NEPA analysis include, but may not be limited to, the following: the effect that adoption of Standards will have on resource conditions, uses, and users of public land, and the effect that adoption of Guidelines will have on livestock operations.

Dated: January 23, 1996.

Bill Calkins,

State Director.

[FR Doc. 96-1761 Filed 1-30-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-FB-M

[UT-056-1430-01-24-1A]

Mountain Valley Management Framework Plan; Intent to Amend

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to amend plan.

SUMMARY: This Notice of Intent is to advise the public that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intends to consider a proposal which would require amending an existing planning document.

DATES: The comment period for this proposed plan amendment will commence with publication of this notice. Comments must be submitted within the thirty day period commencing with the publication of this notice.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dave Henderson, Sevier River Resource Area Manager, 150 East 900 North, Richfield, Utah 84701. Existing planning documents and information are available at the above address or telephone (801) 896-8221. Comments on the proposed plan amendment should be sent to the above address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The BLM is proposing to amend the Mountain Valley Management Framework Plan which includes public lands in Sanpete County, Utah. The purpose of the amendment would be to identify certain lands as suitable for direct sale pursuant to Section 203 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The lands identified for direct sale comprise 10.2 acres described as follows: T. 19 S., R. 2 E., Sec. 19, Lot 8, and Section 30, Lots 5 and 8, Salt Lake Meridian, Utah. The existing plan does not identify these lands for disposal. However, because of the resource values, public values, and objectives involved, the public interest may well be served by sale of these