



File Code: 1920-2/2670

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## Planning Update

# Proposed Threatened and Endangered Species Amendment

This update is for those interested in tracking the progress of the **Threatened and Endangered Species Amendment** to the *Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)*. The analysis for the proposed amendment continues to progress. This update describes what has been accomplished to date, what is yet to be completed, and how additional information can be obtained.

- **Biological Assessment Initiated**

In 1999, the Forest began informally consulting and seeking technical assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) regarding a *Biological Assessment for Threatened and Endangered Species on the Monongahela National Forest (BA)*. This BA was initiated to:

1. Evaluate the effects of ongoing management practices on national forest system lands of the Monongahela National Forest;
2. Determine if existing *Forest Plan* standards and guidelines should be adjusted or if additional mitigation measures need to be implemented to protect threatened and endangered species;
3. Ensure that management decisions employ state-of-the-science information regarding federally listed species; and
4. Provide a basis for an amendment to the *Forest Plan*, if such an amendment is desirable.

The BA is the first step in updating the *Forest Plan*, if needed, to reflect changing needs or information about threatened and endangered species. The BA was completed in November 2000 and sent to the FWS for their review.

- **Public Comments Sought and Reviewed**

During the 30-day period when FWS was evaluating the initiation package for completeness, the Forest sought comments from over 700 individuals on a Proposed Action for a Threatened and Endangered Species Amendment to the *Forest Plan*. This information was mailed February 1, 2001, with a request to respond by March 12, 2001. The Forest also notified the public of the Proposed Action's availability by publishing legal notices in several newspapers across the State of West Virginia, and listing it in several issues of the Monongahela National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions. Over 115 responses (letters, faxes, e-mails, and phone calls) – sent by various concerned citizens, interest groups, and other agencies – received during and after this time period have been accepted and reviewed.



Respondents' comments are currently being used to identify issues and develop alternatives. The comments will be used in the near future to analyze the effects of the alternatives.

- **Biological Assessment Revised**

After completing their review of the November 2000 BA, the FWS recommended that the Forest revise the BA to:

1. Explicitly and fully integrate into the BA new management direction that was concurrently being incorporated by FWS into Appendix A of the *Appalachian Northern Flying Squirrels Recovery Plan (Glaucomyssabrinus fuscus and Glaucomyssabrinus coloratus)*; and
2. Clarify a few general points and make minor editorial and/or formatting changes.

As recommended, the Forest completed a Revised BA and submitted it as part of a consultation initiation package to FWS for review in October 2001—after receiving notice that the Appalachian Northern Flying Squirrels Recovery Plan (Updated) was approved September 6, 2001.

- **Revised Biological Assessment/Initiation Package Accepted by FWS**

In November 2001, the FWS finished reviewing the revised BA. They found the September 2001 BA adequately evaluated the results of the continued implementation of the *Forest Plan* on the nine federally listed species that occur on the Monongahela National Forest.

- **FWS Concurrence and Initiation of Formal Consultation**

In their letter to the Forest dated November 9, 2001, the FWS stated that they concur with the determinations made in the September 2001 BA. These determinations include a “No Effect” for the threatened Virginia Spiraea, *Spiraea virginiana*, and a “May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect” for:

1. Bald eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* – threatened
2. Cheat Mountain salamander, *Plethodon nettingi* – threatened
3. Virginia big-eared bat, *Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus* - endangered
4. West Virginia northern flying squirrel, *Glaucomyssabrinus fuscus* - endangered
5. Running buffalo clover, *Trifolium stoloniferum* - endangered
6. Shale barren rock cress, *Arabis serotina* – endangered
7. Small whorled pogonia, *Isotria medioloides* – endangered

No further Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) is required with the FWS on the above eight species at the programmatic level. If plans change at the programmatic level, or if additional information on listed and proposed, species or species of concern becomes available, this determination may be reconsidered.

The FWS further concurred with the Forest's determination regarding the effects on the endangered Indiana bat, *Myotis sodalis*. The FWS agreed that continued implementation of the *Forest Plan* will result in a “May Affect, Is Likely to Adversely Affect” determination for

the Indiana bat. Based on this determination, formal consultation, as required by the ESA, was initiated for the Indiana bat as of October 9, 2001.

- **Biological Opinion Expected in February**

The FWS is currently drafting a Biological Opinion (BO) regarding the Indiana bat and expects to issue it in February 2002. Once the BO is finalized, the Forest will post it for public review on the Monongahela National Forest's website at [www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/environmental/environmental\\_index.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/environmental/environmental_index.htm).

- **Environmental Assessment to be Completed**

As a result of the BA and FWS findings, the Forest is proceeding with an environmental assessment to amend the *Forest Plan*. Because of the Forest and FWS's collaborative efforts throughout the BA process, and during the ongoing NEPA and ESA processes, few surprises are expected from the final BO.

The BO will identify "Terms and Conditions," "Reasonable and Prudent Measures," and "Conservation Recommendations," which will be evaluated for inclusion in the analysis. This information and the issues raised during scoping for the Proposed Action will be used to determine how many alternatives will be analyzed and assess the effects of each alternative. Thus, the assessment is expected to be completed soon after the FWS issues the BO.

- **Biological Assessment Is Available**

Given FWS's findings, no further revisions of the BA are expected. To obtain a copy of the September 2001 BA, access the Forest's website or contact--

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- **Questions or Comments?**

If you have any questions or comments about the analysis process, please contact Laura using the information above. If you have questions or comments about the consultation process with the FWS or the BA please contact Dan Arling, Forest Wildlife Biologist, at [darling@fs.fed.us](mailto:darling@fs.fed.us) or at 304-636-1800, extension 202.

We look forward to your continued participation in the analysis of the Proposed Threatened and Endangered Species Plan Amendment.

Sincerely,

*Don G. Carroll*

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Forest Supervisor