

New Mexico Chapter of
The Wildlife Society



Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Weeks of Friday, January 24th through March 28th 2014

Check out the chapter on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Wildlife-Society-New-Mexico-Chapter/122478411098284>

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1. Please submit articles for the NM TWS Chapter Newsletter to Ryan Walker

Please submit articles and other information regarding wildlife conservation and management in New Mexico to Ryan Walker

(ryan.walker@state.nm.us), the new editor of the NM TWS Newsletter.

Information on management-related work being done by state or federal agencies or research being carried out at universities is welcome. Photo submissions by the original photographer are also welcome.

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2. Climate change: 2013 ranked 4th warmest year

CBC News Posted: Jan 21, 2014 3:14 PM ET Last Updated: Jan 21, 2014 3:14 PM ET.

NASA and NOAA update global temperatures from last 134 years

Last year was one of the warmest ever recorded on Earth since scientists began keeping global average temperature stats 134 years ago, climate experts from two U.S. agencies revealed today.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) ranked 2013 as being the fourth-warmest year ever, tied with 2003. NASA, which conducted its own report and processed the data sets differently, declared 2013 to be the seventh warmest year since 1880.

Despite the difference in rankings between the two agencies, the data "clearly makes this decade the warmest in historical period," Gavin Schmidt, deputy director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, told reporters in a teleconference.

Schmidt noted that both analyses are actually very similar.

"The difference between the joint fourth place and the joint seventh place is within 0.02 C of a degree," he said, adding that NASA processes its data differently than NOAA.

NASA and NOAA are the keepers of the world's climate data. Each year, both agencies produce independent reports charting the planet's temperature changes, matched against historical data.

The annual reports are considered to be state of the climate addresses and help to give scientists a big-picture overview of the effects of global warming.

9 out of 10 warmest years were in 2000s

In NOAA's annual global analyses, researchers put the average world temperature (combined land and ocean surface temperatures) last year at 14.52 C.

That was 0.62 C above the 20th-century average of 13.9 C, making 2013 the 37th consecutive year that the yearly global temperature exceeded the average.

The global land temperature was just shy of 1 C (0.99 C) above the 20th-century average, according to NOAA.

Both NOAA and NASA said that nine out of 10 of the warmest years ever recorded between 1880 and 2013 were within the last 13 years. Only one entry prior to the 2000s, the year 1998, cracked the top 10.

The hottest recorded year so far was in 2010, when a temperature anomaly of 0.66 C was recorded above the 20th-century average. It topped both NOAA and NASA's lists.

Tom Karl, director of NOAA's National Climatic Data Center, told reporters that as the world continues to warm, high latitudes generally get wetter and the subtropics get drier.

"We saw, for example, in Brazil they had severe droughts for the second consecutive year, in many ways it was probably the worst in the past 50 years. We had an early onset to the southwest Indian monsoon, some of the worst flooding in the past half century," he said.

Warmer winter, spring in Canada

"Even though we had, on balance, a rather average-looking precipitation year, certainly in some parts we had far too much rain and in other parts far too little."

NOAA's analysis said Canada experienced a warmer-than-average winter and spring, as well as the eighth-warmest summer on record.

North America as a whole was hotter than normal in 2013, with Alaska having its second-warmest winter on record.

However, Karl said that some parts of the U.S. experienced cooler-than-average temperatures, due to the cooling effects of La Nina in the eastern Pacific and significant rainfall during the warmer months of the year.

A NOAA map showing global precipitation trends showed that a section of southern and central Canada was the wettest on record in 2013, while a region of coastal western Canada was the driest.

In recent years, parts of Asia, Africa, Australia and the Arctic in particular have undergone dramatic warming.

Article link: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/climate-change-2013-ranked-4th-warmest-year-1.2505077>

3. Migration of Monarch Butterflies Shrinks Again Under Inhospitable Conditions

By MICHAEL WINES JAN. 29, 2014

Faltering under extreme weather and vanishing habitats, the yearly winter migration of monarch butterflies to a handful of forested Mexican mountains dwindled precipitously in December, continuing what scientists said was an increasingly alarming decline.

The migrating population has become so small — perhaps 35 million, experts guess — that the prospects of its rebounding to levels seen even five years ago are diminishing. At worst, scientists said, a migration widely called one of the world's great natural spectacles is in danger of effectively vanishing.

The Mexican government and the World Wildlife Fund said at a news conference on Wednesday that the span of forest inhabited by the overwintering monarchs shrank last month to a bare 1.65 acres — the equivalent of about one and a quarter football fields. Not only was that a record low, but it was just 56 percent of last year's total, which was itself a record low.

At their peak in 1996, the monarchs occupied nearly 45 acres of forest.

The acreage covered by monarchs, which has been surveyed annually since 1993, is a rough proxy for the actual number of butterflies that survive the arduous migration to and from the mountains.

Karen S. Oberhauser, a conservation biologist at the University of Minnesota who has studied monarchs for decades, called the latest estimate shocking.

“This is the third straight year of steep declines, which I think is really scary,” she said. “This phenomenon — both the phenomenon of their migration and the phenomenon of so many individuals doing it — that's at risk.”

Mexico is the southern terminus of an age-old journey in which monarchs shuttle back and forth between far-flung summertime havens in Canada and the United States and a single winter home in Mexico's Sierra Madre mountains.

An internal compass guides the butterflies each fall to a small cluster of mountains where ideal temperatures and humidity allow them to rest, clinging to trees by the millions like brilliant orange capes, until they begin the northward return trip each March.

By some estimates, a billion or more monarchs once made the 2,500-mile-plus trip, breeding and dying along the route north so that their descendants were actually the ones that completed the migration.

The number of surviving butterflies has varied from year to year, sometimes wildly, but the decrease in the size of the migration in the last decade has been steep and generally steady.

The latest drop is best explained by a two-year stretch of bad weather, said Chip Taylor, a biologist at the University of Kansas who has studied the butterflies for decades. But while good weather may help the monarchs rebuild their numbers, their long-term problem — the steady shrinking of habitat along their migratory route — poses a far greater danger.

The monarchs' migratory freeway runs through the Great Plains. As they flew north from Mexico in early 2012, Dr. Taylor said, months of near-record heat sapped their endurance and skewed their migratory patterns in ways that limited their ability to reproduce.

Last spring, he said, the opposite happened: Unusual springtime cold in Texas delayed the butterflies' northward migration, causing them to arrive late in areas where they would normally have bred weeks earlier.

"They have to arrive in the middle of a 40-day period to do really well," Dr. Taylor said. "If they arrive too early, the population crashes, and if they arrive too late, the population crashes."

A larger migration might have weathered the cold snap, but given their losses the previous year, "the butterflies really didn't have the capacity to turn things around," he said.

The loss of habitat is a far more daunting problem, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Oberhauser said.

Monarchs lay their eggs only on milkweed, and patches of the plant have rapidly disappeared from the Great Plains over the last decade. As corn prices have risen — spurred in part by a government mandate to add ethanol to gasoline — farmers have planted tens of millions of acres of idle land along the monarchs' path that once provided both milkweed and nectar.

At the same time, growers have switched en masse to crops that are genetically engineered to tolerate herbicides. The increased use of herbicides has all but wiped out milkweed that once sprouted between rows of corn and soybean.

As a result, Dr. Taylor said, the monarchs must travel farther and use more energy to find places to lay their eggs. With their body fat depleted, the butterflies lay fewer eggs, or die before they have a chance to reproduce.

The monarchs are but the most visible victims of the habitat loss, Dr. Oberhauser said. A wide variety of pollinators and other insects, including many that are beneficial to farmers, are also disappearing, she said, along with the predators that feed on them.

Article link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/30/us/monarch-butterflies-falter-under-extreme-weather.html? r=1>

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4. White House Announces 7 Regional Climate Hubs

By CORAL DAVENPORT FEB. 5, 2014

WASHINGTON — On the heels of the Senate’s passage of a long-awaited farm bill, the Obama administration announced the creation of seven regional “climate hubs” on Wednesday to help farmers and rural communities respond to the risks of climate change, including drought, invasive pests, fires and floods.

White House officials described the move as one of several executive actions that President Obama will take on climate change without action from Congress.

In substance, the creation of the climate hubs is a limited step, but it is part of a broader campaign by the administration to advance climate policy wherever possible with executive authority. The action is also part of a push to build political support for the administration’s more divisive moves on climate change — in particular, the Environmental Protection Agency’s regulations on coal-fired power plants.

Tom Vilsack, the secretary of agriculture and a former Iowa governor, announced the creation of the climate hubs at a White House briefing.

“For generations, America’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners have innovated and adapted to challenges,” Mr. Vilsack said, according to prepared remarks. “Today, they face a new and more complex threat in the form of a changing and shifting climate, which impacts both our nation’s forests and our farmers’ bottom lines.”

The hubs will be in Ames, Iowa; Durham, N.H.; Raleigh, N.C.; Fort Collins, Colo.; El Reno, Okla.; Corvallis, Ore.; and Las Cruces, N.M. The hubs will be set up at existing federal facilities and will not receive extra financing.

Rural communities in Republican voting districts often have a negative view of the E.P.A., which regulates agricultural activities, like the use of pesticides and water on farms. But farmers are also on the front lines of extreme weather, particularly increased drought, which scientists say is linked to climate change.

The farm belt suffered deeply during the record drought of 2012, and the government estimates that the American economy lost \$50 billion because of drought from 2011 to 2013, much of that from the agricultural sector.

The Obama administration hopes the program will help farmers adapt to climate change while making the case for broader climate regulations.

The E.P.A. is now drafting rules that will limit carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants and potentially shutter hundreds of them across the country. The administration anticipates objections from the coal industry and many states when the regulations are completed.

Nebraska is already suing the administration over a draft climate change regulation issued in September, which would cut carbon pollution from future coal-fired power plants.

Article link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/06/us/next-phase-of-obamas-executive-push-climate-hubs.html?ref=earth>

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5. Cities could be wildlife refuges of the future

By Madhusudan Katti / February 13, 2014

Fresno, Calif. - Mention the word wildlife to a city dweller and images of animals and birds in remote natural surroundings will probably come to mind – not in an empty parking lot around the corner. But research shows that cities can in fact support wildlife biodiversity, and this can have major implications for conservation efforts.

On a crowded planet, protecting species in their natural habitat is proving increasingly difficult. Humans continue to expand their networks of cities, towns, and farms, leaving few remaining natural animal habitats. By 2030, cities are expected to occupy three times as much land as they did in 2010. With the number of species going extinct on the rise, it is necessary to consider the potential of urban environments to serve as refuges for the survivors.

In 2010, the Convention on Biological Diversity commissioned a new global assessment of the state of biodiversity in urban areas. Their findings, published in the book "Cities and Biodiversity Outlook," which I co-edited, were not entirely bleak. It turns out that cities support biodiversity and provide opportunities for innovative approaches to conservation.

A recent global analysis of urban plant and bird diversity found that cities have lost an average of one-third of the native species found in their surrounding region. While this level is worrying, it is worth noting that two-thirds of the native plant and bird species continue to exist in cities that were never designed with biodiversity protection in mind. In fact, at least 20 percent of the world's known bird species now occur in urban areas, as do at least 5 percent of the known plant species. More conscious green landscape designs in cities can only help support more of the native species diversity.

While urbanization displaces many species, others have adapted and not only survive but thrive in cities. House sparrows, rock pigeons, starlings, brown rats, and feral house cats are just some examples of species that are ubiquitous in many cities worldwide. More surprisingly, many rarer species are adapting to suburban environments, including San Joaquin Kit Fox of central California.

For many native species, urban habitats may actually be more attractive as refuges. They provide easier and more predictable access to water and food resources, warmer temperatures in the winter, and often fewer predators. Continued breeding can drive the long-term evolution of urban species as they adapt to their new environment.

Species such as the house sparrow have evolved to be strongly dependent on human habitation. And warmer nights and feeding by humans have even changed the migration pathways and geographic ranges of some migratory species. For example, a population of European Blackcap Warblers now winters in suburban southern England instead of Africa.

Noise pollution is another factor influencing urban ecology and affecting the many animals that communicate using sound, such as birds, frogs, and some insects. Birds that have adapted to the urban soundscape show distinct dialects with songs that are simpler, louder, or higher pitched to cut through the background noise.

San Francisco's resident White-Crowned Sparrows have changed their tune over the past 30 years as the city has grown noisier, losing some distinct notes of their songs. This may have evolutionary consequences, as dialect formation is often the first step toward speciation. Other studies have found genetic differences between urban and nonurban populations of some species, indicating fairly rapid evolutionary changes.

New wildlife communities are coming together in cities, often with accidental manipulation and active management by humans. These communities can play an important role in both the urban ecosystems and surrounding natural habitats. Urban and suburban gardens, for example, can support important reservoir populations of bees and other pollinators that find it difficult to survive under modern intensive agriculture.

The overall picture is not bleak. Cities can provide new habitats that may be quite different from those in natural ecosystems but can still support a variety of species. Species that evolve under such urban conditions may well represent what the future holds for much of Earth's biodiversity.

Article link: <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2014/0213/Cities-could-be-wildlife-refuges-of-the-future-video>

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6.A Crazy Ant Invader Uses Acid to Its Advantage

FEB. 13, 2014 by James Gorman

The crazy ant, the latest ant to invade North America, is having remarkable success at replacing its predecessor, the red fire ant, former king of the invaders. Part of the reason, according to research at the University of Texas, is that the newcomer can detoxify fire ant venom in a way not seen before in other insects or animals.

The crazy ant uses its own venom to neutralize that of the fire ant, which is deadly to many other ants and gives the fire ant its notorious sting.

Crazy ants, *Nylanderia fulva*, are named for their scattershot movements and were first seen in the Houston area and in Florida 12 years ago. They have since been found in Mississippi and Louisiana. They can quickly dominate an ecosystem, wiping out the fire ants that came before them, according to Edward G. LeBrun, who reported the new research Thursday in the journal *Science*.

Dr. LeBrun and his colleagues Nathan T. Jones and Lawrence E. Gilbert exposed crazy ants to fire ant venom and recorded video of the behavior that followed. The crazy ants engaged in an intense kind of grooming, in which they repeatedly seemed to take their own venom from a pore in their abdomens and spread it all over themselves.

After this behavior, 98 percent of the crazy ants survived. When the scientists blocked the pore that releases the venom, only 48 percent survived.

The researchers did additional tests to prove that the ants were using their own venom and to show that the main ingredient, formic acid, was what detoxified the fire ant venom. They don't yet know how the detoxification works chemically.

This is not good news for the fire ants, Dr. LeBrun said. The species, he said, are direct competitors and both are "opportunistic, omnivorous, ground foraging."

"Both feed on carrion," he said. "Both fight with other ant species to control any resources." And, he added, "they are also competing for nest space. Fire ants dig elaborate nests. Crazy ants don't dig, but a great nest site is fire ant mounds."

The crazy ants are outcompeting the fire ants on all counts — and they have protection against fire ant venom.

What this means for human beings depends on how you look at it. Fire ants sting. Crazy ants don't. But crazy ants invade houses, crawl up pant legs, short out power lines and generally drive human beings themselves crazy.

Dr. LeBrun said that, for people worried about the spread of crazy ants, human activity is the one thing that limits how fast they spread. Crazy ants only establish new colonies naturally when one gets too big and has to divide. This is a slow process. But if humans move them in wood or potted plants or anything that they are carrying in their cars and trucks, then they spread much faster.

As to the possibility of humans using formic acid as a defense against fire ant stings, Dr. LeBrun wrote in an email, "I've tried it. It does not help. In fact it is about as much fun as you might imagine letting a very large fire ant sting you and then smearing acid on the sting would be."

Article link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/14/science/a-crazy-ant-invader-uses-acid-to-its-advantage.html?ref=earth>

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7.Obama to Propose Shift in Wildfire Funding

By CORAL DAVENPORT FEB. 22, 2014

WASHINGTON — President Obama's annual budget request to Congress will propose a significant change in how the government pays to fight wildfires, administration officials said, a move that they say reflects the ways in which climate change is increasing the risk for and cost of those fires.

The wildfire funding shift is one in a series of recent White House actions related to climate change as Mr. Obama tries to highlight the issue and build political support for his administration's more muscular policies, like curbing carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants. On Monday, Mr. Obama plans to describe his proposal at a meeting in Washington with governors of Western states that have been ravaged recently by severe drought and wildfires.

The proposal will ask Congress to pay the costs of fighting extreme wildfires in the same way it finances the federal response to disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes, the officials said. When unpredictable events like Hurricane Sandy are destructive enough to be declared disasters by the president, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is authorized to exceed its annual budget and draw on a special disaster account. The account is adjusted each year to reflect the 10-year average cost of responding to such events.

Mr. Obama's budget proposal would create a similar exception for the Interior and Agriculture Departments, which have agencies that are responsible for wildfire response. In recent years, as wildfires have become more frequent and intense in the Western United States, the cost of fighting the fires has soared.

In real dollar terms, adjusted for inflation, the Forest Service and Interior Department spent an average of \$1.4 billion in annual wildfire protection from 1991 to 1999, according to a report by Headwaters Economics, a nonprofit research group. But that spending has more than doubled — from 2002 to 2012, the agencies spent an average of \$3.5 billion to fight wildfires.

In a conference call with reporters last summer, the agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack, said: "When you take resources to suppress fires, you sometimes have to take it from the very resources that you would use to restore property or to prevent fires to begin with. And that just basically shifts the risk to a much longer-term and more serious risk."

A series of scientific studies have warned that increasing carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels could cause the planet to warm by more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century, leading to rising sea levels, stronger storms and more extreme droughts. A study published last year by Forest Service researchers concluded that wildfires were expected to increase 50 percent across the United States under a changing climate, and over 100 percent in areas of the Western United States by 2050.

In his second term, Mr. Obama has taken on the politically contentious challenge of tackling climate change. At the center of his climate policy is a set of controversial Environmental Protection Agency regulations to curb carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants — rules that could shutter hundreds of such plants. As he tries to build political support for the rules, Mr. Obama has

sought to make the case that the costs of damage from climate change will be far greater than the costs of mitigating climate change.

Mr. Obama's budget request, which he will deliver to Congress next month, will include several other direct references to the costs of climate change, according to a White House official. This month, Mr. Obama announced that his budget would include a request from Congress for a \$1 billion "climate resiliency fund."

While there is intense resistance from Republicans and some Democrats in Congress to most of Mr. Obama's climate policies, the wildfire funding proposal has bipartisan support. His proposal is based on a Senate bill sponsored by Senators Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon, and Michael D. Crapo, Republican of Idaho. A similar bill in the House also has bipartisan support. A coalition of environmentalists, sportsmen and timber producers has lobbied in favor of the bill.

Article link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/us/obama-to-propose-shift-in-wildfire-funding.html?ref=earth>

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8. Jaguar gets new layer of US protection

March 05, 2014 12:00 am • By Tony Davis

Nearly 17 years after gaining endangered status in the United States, the jaguar on Tuesday got nearly 765,000 acres of legally designated prime Southwestern habitat to help it survive and recover.

But it's not clear how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision creating jaguar critical habitat in 15 Southern Arizona mountain ranges and a small slice of southwest New Mexico will affect future projects there — beyond the proposed Rosemont Mine, which the service has said will be OK.

The area designated on Tuesday was nearly 100,000 acres less than was once proposed as critical habitat. The Tohono O'odham Reservation and Fort Huachuca, which contained large blocks of proposed critical habitat, were knocked out of the final habitat area because the service said both entities are doing good conservation work already.

The Rosemont Mine site, in the Santa Rita Mountains southeast of Tucson, stayed in the final habitat designation.

Critical habitat legally protects these lands from destruction or severe modification by land clearing. But last year, the Wildlife Service issued a

biological opinion saying the Rosemont Mine won't destroy or "adversely modify" such habitat.

The mine will require fencing off 3,513 acres near where the United States' only known wild jaguar has been photographed recently. Rosemont will directly affect another 499 acres of the habitat with new roads and trails, the Wildlife Service said.

The service reasoned that this area is far less than 1 percent of the total critical habitat. The area won't be large enough to block the animal's movements between the U.S. and Mexico, the service said.

But that opinion doesn't automatically mean another large project in jaguar habitat — such as housing, new mining or commercial development — will get the same treatment as Rosemont, a Wildlife Service official said Tuesday.

"There's no specific hard and fast answer as to when a federal action is or isn't destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat, and therefore prohibited," said Steve Spangle, chief field supervisor for the service's Arizona offices. "A different project, at a different place or different time, would have to undergo its own fact-specific analysis."

The Center for Biological Diversity, the Tucson-based environmental group whose litigation led to Tuesday's habitat decision, says that to speculate on the Rosemont opinion's impact on other projects is looking too far ahead. That's because the center's activists plan to challenge Rosemont's biological opinion in court if the mine is ultimately approved by the Forest Service.

Center officials have said that it's premature for the Wildlife Service to say that jaguar habitat damaged by the mine isn't important because the feds haven't yet established formal jaguar recovery goals.

"We interpret this designation to mean that the Santa Ritas are protected from the mine," said Michael Robinson, a conservation advocate for the center. "The biological opinion is an opinion. This is the final rule."

Rosemont Copper, which once strongly opposed the critical-habitat designation, doesn't plan to fight it in court, said Jan Howard, a company spokeswoman.

"Our impacts have already been addressed in all the plans for Rosemont. It's been addressed in the biological opinion and the final environmental impact statement," Howard said.

This habitat decision was born in controversy.

From the time the jaguar was listed as endangered in mid-1997, the Wildlife Service, public-lands ranchers and the Arizona Game and Fish Department opposed critical habitat. Ranchers were concerned it would lead to jaguar reintroduction or give environmentalists a legal opening to try to shut ranches down.

They all argued it made no sense to protect jaguar habitat here when the overwhelming share of the animal's current homeland is south of the border with Mexico.

But a lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Defenders of Wildlife led to a federal court ruling in 2009 tossing out an earlier Wildlife Service decision not to designate critical habitat.

Today, the habitat designation is long overdue, said a veteran jaguar advocate, Sergio Avila, a biologist and program manager for the conservationist Sky Island Alliance.

Avila noted that it's been 18 years since jaguar Macho B — who died by euthanasia five years ago this week — was first sighted in the Baboquivari Mountains and since Southern Arizona rancher Warner Glenn saw a second jaguar in the Peloncillo Mountains.

"Finally we have leadership to designate critical habitat for the jaguars," Avila said. "A lot of time has been wasted."

He said that one of many things about this designation worth celebrating is that all projects within critical habitat that lie on federal land have federal funding or need a federal permit will need a formal review of their habitat impacts. That brings science into the picture, he said.

But for Arizona Game and Fish, the designation means another layer of bureaucracy to get through to do things on this land that could modify the environment, spokesman Jim Paxon said.

"The service has made guarantees it won't affect private landowners and standard land management practices," he said. But now, the state agency will need formal reviews for activities such as prescribed burning or building or modifying water tanks, he said.

"We have such a little bit of total habitat for the jaguars. Are we going to be able to make a difference in persistence for the species with such limited habitat here?" he asked.

Patrick Bray, executive vice president of the Arizona Cattlemen's Association, didn't return calls Tuesday seeking comment on the habitat decision.

Article link: http://azstarnet.com/news/local/jaguar-gets-new-layer-of-us-protection/article_f88e92cb-eefe-559c-8c73-aaafa6837794.html

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9. FWS Finalizes Agreement to Protect Lesser Prairie Chicken

By Kate Bissell March 14, 2014

With a March 31 deadline approaching for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to make a decision on the listing status of the lesser prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), the agency has finalized a voluntary agreement with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), an advocate for the rights of member states and provinces to manage fish and wildlife within their borders.

The agreement titled the Range-wide Oil and Gas Industry Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances is designed to prevent further disturbances from oil and gas drilling activities on private lands within lesser prairie chicken habitat in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. Landowners and companies that enroll in the agreement will take actions to protect prairie chicken habitat, or pay a mitigation fee if they harm habitat. In return, the FWS will not impose further restrictions on enrollees if the bird is listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Mitigation fees will go towards conservation and restoration on other private lands enrolled under the agreement. Though the goal of the agreement is to avoid prairie chicken listing, it is unclear whether it will be enough to keep the bird off the endangered species list; prairie chicken habitat would continue to be fragmented under the agreement, and some critics fear that most fragments would be too small to support a breeding population.

Sources: Greenwire (March 3, 2014), USFWS (accessed March, 2014)

Article link: <http://news.wildlife.org/featured/fws-finalizes-agreement-to-protect-lesser-prairie-chicken/>

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10. Obama Turns to Web to Illustrate the Effects of a Changing Climate

By CORAL DAVENPORT MARCH 19, 2014

WASHINGTON — President Obama wants Americans to see how climate change could deluge or destroy their own backyards — and to make it as easy as opening a web-based app.

As part of an effort to make the public see global warming as a tangible and immediate problem, the White House on Wednesday inaugurated a website, climate.data.gov, aimed at turning scientific data about projected droughts and wildfires and the rise in sea levels into eye-catching digital presentations that can be mapped using simple software apps.

The project is the brainchild of Mr. Obama's counselor, John D. Podesta, and the White House science adviser, John P. Holdren.

The effort comes as Mr. Obama prepares to announce a set of aggressive climate change regulations aimed at limiting emissions from coal-fired plants. Although a poll by the Pew Research Center last October found that 67 percent of Americans believe that global warming is happening, a Pew poll in January showed that Americans ranked global warming as 19th on a list of 20 issues for Congress and the president.

Mr. Podesta has taken on the uphill task of building a political case for the climate rules, both by defusing the opposition and by trying to create an urgent sense among Americans that they are necessary. The website is the latest step in that strategy.

"Localizing this information gives a sense of how this affects people and spurs action," Mr. Podesta told a small group of reporters at the White House on Wednesday. "If you're thinking about this from the perspective of how your local community will be affected, it's likely to change that question of salience."

Initially, the website will serve mostly as a clearinghouse for climate science data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States Geological Survey, the Defense Department and NASA. The first batch of data will focus on coastal flooding and the rise in sea levels.

Most users will not be able to do much yet on their own. Instead, NASA and NOAA will call on researchers and private companies to create software simulations illustrating the impact of rising sea levels.

Some major software and mapping companies have already expressed interest in using the climate data. Chief among them are Google and Esri, a Redlands, Calif., company that supplies mapping and geographic information systems software to federal agencies, including the C.I.A., and city and local governments. Company executives say they anticipate a strong interest in the data. “There’s a market for this,” said Jack Dangermond, Esri’s chief executive, who joined Mr. Podesta and Mr. Holdren at the White House. “We’re excited to use it. Reading climate data in real time is unusual.”

Esri’s mapping programs already layer census and income data on top of geographical data. The company has used government data on the projected rise in sea levels to create an interactive map of what will happen, for example, should a hurricane hit the town of Gloucester, Mass. The digital map shows how flooding will affect specific buildings, roads, houses, schools, and low-income and older residents.

White House officials hope that if city planners and homeowners around the country see such vivid digital projections of the impact of climate change in their backyards, it could melt political resistance to climate policy and create a new impetus for action. In 2012 as North Carolina was creating a development plan, the state legislature voted to disregard scientific projections that climate change would cause rising sea levels.

“If people in North Carolina had had this initiative, that decision would have been less likely,” Mr. Holdren told reporters at the White House.

Google also hopes to combine its mapping technology with the government climate data. “What if we could make information about sea-level rise, extreme heat and drought as simple to digest and interactive as using Google Maps to get directions?” said Rebecca Moore, the engineering manager of Google Earth, who was also at the White House. “That is not possible, but we think it’s possible to get a lot closer. There’s the possibility to create a living, breathing dashboard in a way people can understand and relate to.”

White House officials said they hoped to help recreate the success of desktop and mobile apps and software that were built by private companies using government data, like on the real estate sites Trulia, Redfin and Zillow. Those apps use information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau to help buyers make more informed decisions about buying a home.

But the research and projections on climate change are vastly more complex than simple housing, labor and census statistics. Although a number of scientific reports have reached the consensus that carbon pollution from the burning of fossil fuels has warmed the planet — leading to a future of rising sea levels, melting land ice, an increase in the most damaging types of hurricanes, and

drought in some places and deluges in others — scientists warn against trying to use that data to model precisely what will happen.

“The essence of dealing with climate change is not so much about identifying specific impacts at a specific time in the future, it’s about managing risk,” Christopher B. Field, the director of the department of global ecology at Stanford University, said in February.

But Anthony Janetos, director of the Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future at Boston University, said there was still much merit to the effort.

“With respect to some aspects of the physical climate system, like sea-level rise, we’re on firm enough ground that you can do this kind of risk analysis,” he said. For software that will make sense of the government’s climate data, he added, “there will be a market.”

Article link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/us/politics/white-house-to-introduce-climate-data-website.html?ref=science>

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11. BLM Seeks Proposals to Reduce Wild Horse and Burro Populations

March 21, 2014 By Kate Bissell

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently announced a request for research proposals to investigate new and innovative techniques to help suppress the ever-expanding population of wild horses and burros present on BLM lands in western states.

As of February 2013, the BLM estimates that there are almost 50,000 wild horses and burros in holding pastures across 10 western states, of which approximately 40,000 are found on BLM lands. That’s 14,000 more than the number of horses and burros that the agency has determined can exist on the rangeland without interfering with resources such as food and habitat use by native animals. Further, large populations of horses tend to compete with native wildlife at watering holes, trample vegetation, and overgraze rangeland. With herd sizes capable of doubling every four years without intervention, the BLM is searching for more effective methods to decrease the reproductive potential of herds and reduce the number of animals present in holding pastures.

For information on submitting a proposal, see <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=wild%20horse>, Funding Opportunity number L14AS00048.

Sources: National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition (accessed, March 2014), BLM Horses and Burros Factsheet (accessed, March 2014), BLM call for proposals (accessed, March 2014), Greenwire (March 12, 2014).

Article link: <http://news.wildlife.org/featured/blm-seeks-proposals-to-reduce-wild-horse-and-burro-populations/>

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12. Call for Papers and Posters for National TWS Conference: April 25th 2014 Deadline

March 26, 2014

Don't miss out on the opportunity to be a featured presenter at one of the largest and most prestigious annual meetings for wildlife professionals — the TWS Annual Conference. This year the event is being held in Pittsburgh, PA from October 25-30. Additional details and instructions for submitting your abstract for consideration can be found here: <http://wildlife.org/abstract2014>.

For more information please visit: <http://wildlife.org/abstract2014>

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