

able to prove that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between air pollution and rock gnome lichen declines, even though this relationship has been shown for other lichens in various parts of the world. Different lichen species have different sensitivities to specific air pollutants; in fact, some European species even thrive on increased sulphur levels in the atmosphere and expand their populations in response. We fully intend to pursue further studies of this issue to try to determine the causes for lichen declines. Regardless of whether critical habitat has been designated, Federal agencies are required by the Act to evaluate the direct and indirect effects of their actions on listed species and ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species. Therefore, any Federal activity that has the potential to adversely affect the rock gnome lichen is already subject to the provisions of the Act. However, as we have already stated, at present we have no specific data that indicate air pollutants are causing declines in the lichen. If in the future such data becomes available, we will work to ensure, as we always have, that any Federal agency involved honors its responsibilities under section 7 of the Act, which apply regardless of whether critical habitat is designated. Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency's Class I Air Quality Area designation for the Park offers strict protection for that entire geographic area, because, under current regulations, no degradation of air quality is allowed. This stringent protection is already in place and is not contingent upon proving that listed species are being adversely affected by increasing levels of air pollution. In other parts of the lichen's range that are not designated as Class I Air Quality Areas, Federal agencies responsible for ensuring compliance with the Clean Air Act are still required to ensure that their actions (or lack thereof) are not jeopardizing the continued existence of the lichen or any other listed species, regardless of the designation of critical habitat.

#### Peer Review

In accordance with our policy published on July 1, 1994 (59 FR 34270), we have sought the expert opinions of at least three appropriate and independent specialists regarding our proposed finding. The purpose of such review is to ensure that listing decisions are based on scientifically sound data, assumptions, and analyses. We sent these peer reviewers copies of the proposed finding immediately

following publication in the **Federal Register**. All the peer reviewers who responded supported our proposal not to designate critical habitat, and we have incorporated their comments into this final finding (many are in the "Summary of Comments" section).

#### References Cited

A complete list of all references cited in this finding is available upon request from the Asheville Field Office (see **ADDRESSES** section).

#### Author

The primary author of this document is Nora Murdock (see **ADDRESSES** section).

Dated: September 27, 2001.

**Marshall P. Jones Jr.,**

*Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

#### Notice of Extension To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Swanson River Satellites Natural Gas Project, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** This notice advises the public that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is extending the period to prepare a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Swanson River Satellites Natural Gas project beyond the nine months prescribed in Title XI of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Preparation of the DEIS will be extended for an additional nine months to allow for the USFWS, cooperating agencies, and the right-of-way applicant to collectively identify and refine the project alternatives that will be evaluated in the DEIS.

**DATES:** A Notice of Availability of the DEIS is scheduled to be published July 19, 2002.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments regarding this notice should be directed to: Regional Director, Region 7, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Brian L. Anderson, (907) 786-3379.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On January 29, 2001, Union Oil Company of California d.b.a. Unocal filed an

application with the USFWS for a right-of-way permit to construct the Swanson River Satellites Natural Gas project within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (KNWR). The application was also filed with the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, both of which are cooperating agencies for the environmental review. A notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the project was published in the **Federal Register** on February 27, 2001 (66 FR 12541). Regulations implementing Title XI of ANILCA require that, when necessary, a DEIS be prepared within nine months of the date the application was filed [43 CFR 36.6 (1)]. These regulations also provide for an extension of the nine-month period for a reasonable specific time, if the lead agency determines, for good cause, that the period is insufficient [43 CFR 36.6 (2)].

As lead agency, the USFWS has determined, in consultation with the applicant, that the nine-month period is not sufficient to develop reasonable project alternatives for this large and complex project. An additional nine months will be necessary for the applicant and the cooperating federal agencies to conduct the engineering and environmental studies needed to identify project alternatives that would constitute adequate and feasible access for development of the project while protecting, to the greatest extent practicable, the resources of the KNWR.

This environmental review is being conducted in accordance with the requirements of NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4371 *et seq.*) as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508, and the pertinent regulations of USFWS. Upon completion of the Draft EIS, a Notice of Availability will be published in the **Federal Register**.

**Gary Edwards,**

*Acting Regional Director, Region 7, Fish and Wildlife Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

#### Hanford Reach National Monument Federal Advisory Committee; Meeting Notice

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice; FACA meeting.