

to approval of each new or revised recovery plan. Comments may result in changes to the plan. Comments regarding recovery plan implementation will be forwarded to appropriate Federal or other entities so that they can take these comments into account during the course of implementing recovery actions. Individual responses to comments will not be provided.

The Hawaiian Crow, or 'Alalā, is an omnivorous, forest-dwelling bird endemic to dry and mesic forests on the island of Hawaii. Although 'Alalā were still abundant in the 1890's, their numbers decreased sharply throughout the twentieth century despite legal protection conferred by the Territory of Hawaii in 1931, the Act in 1973, and the State of Hawaii Endangered Species Act in 1982. Progressive range reduction and population fragmentation have characterized the decline. By 1987, the wild 'Alalā population was reduced to a single bird in north Kona, and an unknown number in central Kona, on the west slope of Mauna Loa volcano, Hawaii. The last reproduction of birds in the wild was in 1996, and the wild population declined from 12 birds in 1992 to 2 birds (possibly 3) in 2002, and apparent extinction in the wild in 2003.

Today, the 'Alalā is believed to survive only in captivity. Small population size and inbreeding are the primary threats to the species at present, fertility and hatching success in captivity are currently low, and the incidence of congenital abnormalities is increasing.

Many factors contributed to the decline of 'Alalā in the wild. Destruction of most of the lowland forests restricted the bird's ability to follow seasonal fruiting up and down the mountains. The upland forests have been thinned and fragmented, and many fruiting plants lost, due to logging, ranching, and the effects of grazing by feral pigs, cattle, and sheep. Mongooses, cats, and rats prey on 'Alalā eggs and fledglings. Diseases carried by introduced mosquitoes may have caused the mortality of many 'Alalā, as they did other forest birds. The role of 'Io in this decline, however, is unknown, despite their known effect on released birds. However, 'Io densities are higher, and vulnerability of 'Alalā may be greater, in areas where ungulate grazing has reduced understory cover.

The overall objective of this plan is to provide a framework for the recovery of the 'Alalā so that its protection under the Act is no longer necessary. Recovery is contingent upon protecting and managing suitable habitat for reintroduction of 'Alalā. Recovery actions include measures to protect

habitat where the taxa occurred and habitat where the species is not known to have occurred but which may be suitable, restoration of degraded habitat, removal of feral ungulates from habitat areas, predator control, captive propagation and reintroduction, development of strategies to reduce mortality of reintroduced 'Alalā by 'Io predation, and the development of means to address threats of avian disease. Key to recovery will be propagation of 'Alalā in captivity; removal of feral ungulates that degrade forest habitat, spread introduced nonnative plant species, and create breeding sites for disease-carrying mosquitoes; control of introduced rodents; removal of feral cats that carry toxoplasmosis; and control of invasive plant species. Habitat management and restoration will increase foods available to released 'Alalā and provide better cover for escape in areas with 'Io.

Significant features of the 'Alalā's life history, behavior, ecological interactions, and habitat needs remain unknown. These unknowns, combined with the pressing need to successfully maintain and augment the last remaining population of the species in captivity, led us to develop a draft revised recovery plan that focuses primarily on actions to conserve the 'Alalā in the short-term while working within the framework of a broader long-term recovery strategy. This draft revised recovery plan is therefore presented in three sections: (1) An Introduction and Overview provides information on the biology of the species; (2) a Strategic Plan outlines the overall long-term goals and broad strategies which we anticipate shall remain effective throughout the recovery process for this species; and (3) a 5-year Implementation Plan which sets short-term goals for recovery efforts and research essential to conservation of the species. It is anticipated that new Implementation Plans will be prepared and published as addenda to the revised recovery plan every 3 to 5 years as we gain further knowledge of the 'Alalā and are better able to determine the parameters and techniques for the effective recovery of this species in the wild.

Public Comments Solicited

We solicit written comments on the draft revised recovery plan described. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered in developing a final revised recovery plan.

Authority

The authority for this action is section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533 (f).

Dated: October 16, 2003.

David J. Wesley,

Regional Director, Region 1, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 03-31166 Filed 12-17-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Draft Recovery Plan for the Blackburn's Sphinx Moth (*Manduca blackburni*)

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of document availability for review and comment.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("we") announces the availability of the Draft Recovery Plan for the Blackburn's Sphinx Moth (*Manduca blackburni*) (sphinx moth) for public review and comment. This insect taxon is listed as endangered (45 FR 4770; February 1, 2000), and is endemic to the main Hawaiian Islands. We solicit review and comment from local, State, and Federal agencies, and the public on this draft recovery plan.

DATES: Comments on this draft recovery plan must be received on or before February 17, 2004 to receive our consideration.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the draft recovery plan are available for inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the following locations: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850 (phone: 808-541-3441) and the Hawaii State Library 478 S. King Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813. Requests for copies of the draft plan and written comments and materials regarding this plan should be addressed to the Field Supervisor, Ecological Services, at the above Honolulu address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Field Supervisor at the above Honolulu address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Recovery of endangered or threatened animals and plants is a primary goal of our endangered species program and the Endangered Species Act (Act) (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.* Recovery means

improvement of the status of listed species to the point at which listing is no longer necessary under the criteria set out in section 4(a)(1) of the Act. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for the conservation and survival of the species, establish criteria for downlisting or delisting listed species, and estimate time and cost for implementing the measures needed for recovery.

The Act requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Section 4(f) of the Act requires that public notice, and an opportunity for public review and comment, be provided during recovery plan development. We will consider all information presented during a public comment period prior to approval of each new or revised recovery plan. We, along with other Federal agencies, will also take these comments into account in the course of implementing approved recovery plans. Individual responses to comments will not be provided.

The sphinx moth was federally listed as endangered on February 1, 2000 (65 FR 4770). This insect taxon is currently known to occur on three of the seven Hawaiian Islands where it historically occurred, including Hawaii, Maui, and Kahoolawe. Although some habitat is under public ownership and zoned for conservation purposes, no known sphinx moth habitat complexes are entirely protected, and the species faces threats throughout its range.

The sphinx moth is currently found in association with topographically diverse landscapes that contain low to moderate levels of nonnative vegetation. Vegetation types that support the sphinx moth include dry to mesic shrub land and forest from sea level to mid-elevations. Soil and climatic conditions, as well as physical factors, affect the suitability of habitat within the species' range. The primary threats to the sphinx moth include urban and agricultural development; invasion by non-native plant species; habitat fragmentation and degradation; increased wildfire frequency; impacts from ungulates; other human-caused disturbances that have resulted in substantial losses of habitat throughout the species' historic range; parasitoids and insect predators; and vandalism (collection). Needed conservation activities include protection, management, and restoration of suitable and restorable habitat; out-planting of native *Nothoecstrum* spp. host plants; and a sphinx moth captive breeding program that would augment or expand the existing population within its historic range. This draft

recovery plan identifies 3 recovery units, comprising 13 management units, which are geographic areas recently documented to contain sphinx moth populations and/or sphinx moth host plant populations, and shall be the focus of recovery actions or tasks. The three recovery units and their component management units contain habitat considered necessary for the long-term conservation of the sphinx moth (e.g., networks of suitable habitat patches and connecting lands).

The recovery actions described in this draft recovery plan include: (1) Protect habitat and control threats to the moth and its habitat; (2) expand existing wild *Nothoecstrum* spp. host plant populations; (3) conduct additional research essential to recovery of the sphinx moth; (4) develop and implement a detailed monitoring plan for the sphinx moth; (5) reestablish wild sphinx moth populations within its historic range; (6) develop and provide information for the public on the sphinx moth; and (7) validate recovery objectives.

The recovery objective of this draft recovery plan is to ensure the species' long-term survival and conservation and to conduct research necessary to refine recovery criteria so that the sphinx moth can be reclassified to threatened and eventually delisted.

Public Comments Solicited

We solicit written comments on the draft recovery plan described. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered in developing a final sphinx moth recovery plan.

Authority

The authority for this action is section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: October 14, 2003.

David J. Wesley,

Acting Regional Director, Region 1, Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 03-31189 Filed 12-17-03; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-U

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Mississippi River Basin Panel Meeting

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: This notice announces a meeting of the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force Mississippi

River Basin Regional Panel. The meeting topics are identified in the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

DATES: The Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel will meet from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, January 8, 2004, and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, January 9, 2004. Minutes of the meeting will be available for public inspection during regular business hours, Monday through Friday.

ADDRESSES: The Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel meeting will be held at the Radisson Hotel—New Orleans, 1500 Canal Street, New Orleans, LA 70112. Phone 504-522-4500. Minutes of the meeting will be maintained in the office of Chief, Division of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Suite 322, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22203-1622.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jay Rendall, Mississippi River Basin Panel Chair and Exotic Species Program Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources at (651) 297-1464 or Jerry Rasmussen, Coordinator, MICRA, P.O. Box 774, Bettendorf, IA 52722, at (309) 793-5811, or Shawn Alam, Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force at (703) 358-2025.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pursuant to section 10(a)(2) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App. I), this notice announces meetings of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel. The Task Force was established by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990. The Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel was established by the ANS Task Force in 2002. The Mississippi River Basin Panel, comprised of representatives from Federal, State, local agencies and from private environmental and commercial interests, performs the following activities:

- a. Identifies priorities for activities in the Mississippi River Basin,
- b. develops and submits recommendations to the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force,
- c. coordinates aquatic nuisance species program activities in the Basin,
- d. advises public and private interests on control efforts, and
- e. submits an annual report to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

The purpose of the Panel is to advise and make recommendations to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force on issues relating to the Mississippi River Basin region of the United States that includes thirty-two Mississippi River Basin States: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Kansas, Louisiana,