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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and
Associated National Environmental Policy Act Document for Antioch Dunes
National Wildlife Refuge, Contra Costa County, California

SUMMARY: The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is preparing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document for Antioch Dunes National Wildlife Refuge. This notice advises the public that the Service intends to gather information necessary to prepare a CCP and environmental documents pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, and NEPA. The public is invited to participate in the planning process. The Service is furnishing this notice in compliance with the Service CCP policy to advise other agencies and the public of our intentions, and obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues to include in the environmental documents.

DATES: To ensure that the Service has adequate time to evaluate and incorporate suggestions and other input into the planning process, comments should be received on or before January 29, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments or requests to be added to the mailing list to the following address: Planning Team Leader--Antioch Dunes NWR, California/Nevada Refuge Planning Office, US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2233 Watt Avenue, Sacramento, California, 95825.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Leslie Lew, Planning Team Leader, (916) 979-2085.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended, mandates that all lands within the National Wildlife Refuge System are to be managed in accordance with an approved CCP. The CCP will guide management decisions and identify refuge goals, long-range objectives, and management strategies for achieving refuge purposes. The planning process will consider many elements, including habitat and wildlife management, habitat protection, cultural resources protection, and environmental effects. Public input into this planning process is very important. The CCP will provide other agencies and the public with a clear understanding of the desired conditions for the refuges and how the Service will implement management strategies.

The Service is soliciting information from the public via written comments. The Service will send out special mailings, newspaper articles, and announcements to people who are interested in the refuge. These mailings will provide information on how to participate in public involvement for the CCP. Comments received will be used to develop goals, key issues, and habitat management strategies. Additional opportunities for public participation will occur throughout the

process, which is expected to be completed in late 1999. Data collection has been initiated to create computerized mapping, including vegetation, topography, habitat types and existing land uses.

The refuge was established to protect a unique riverine dune ecosystem and three endangered species. The 55 acres owned by the Service, along with the 12 acres owned by Pacific Gas and Electric that are adjacent to the refuge, support the last known natural populations of the Antioch dunes evening primrose, Contra Costa wallflower, and Lange's metalmark butterfly. The refuge was the first National Wildlife Refuge to be created to protect endangered plants and insects.

In the early 1900's, the isolated dune habitat in the delta began to experience a dramatic change as human development expanded. The easily-accessible sand was harvested to make bricks. Large-scale sand mining and industrial development fragmented the sand dune habitat until only a small portion of the original ecosystem remained. Non-native grasses and vegetation encroached on the sand dunes to crowd the few remaining endangered plants. By the time the refuge was established, only a few acres of remnant dune habitat supported the last natural populations of Antioch Dunes evening-primrose, Contra Costa wallflower, and Lange's metalmark butterfly. The refuge was open for public use until 1986 when it was closed to protect the plants from trampling and wildfire. The refuge consists of two units that are managed to prevent the extinction of these unique species. Intensive management has already resulted in the highest Lange's metalmark butterfly population in 20 years.

The refuge purpose is to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants which are listed as endangered or threatened species. (16 U.S.C. Sec. 1534 (Endangered Species Act of 1973)).

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The outcome of this planning process will be a CCP to guide refuge management for the next 15 years, and associated NEPA document.

It is estimated that a draft CCP and NEPA document will be made available for public review in spring 1999.

Dated: December 21, 1998.

Elizabeth H. Stevens,
Acting Manager, California/Nevada Operations, US Fish and Wildlife
Service, Sacramento, California.

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