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Service Announces Public Scoping Process For Lower Colorado River Authority Transmission Services Corporation Proposed Conservation Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing that we intend to evaluate the impacts of, and alternatives to, the proposed issuance of an incidental take permit (ITP) and hold public scoping meetings in preparation for developing a draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis regarding Lower Colorado River Authority Transmission Services Corporation's (LCRA TSC) proposal to draft a Habitat Conservation Plan (dHCP). The dHCP would cover at least 35 listed species across 241 Texas counties and would accompany LCRA TSC's request for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP).

LCRA TSC is developing a dHCP to support its application for an ITP for transmission lines throughout their current Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) region plus bordering Texas counties (Plan Area). The dHCP will describe, among other things, the steps LCRA TSC will take to minimize and mitigate impacts to the species covered to the maximum extent practicable. The ITP, if issued, would authorize the incidental take of federally threatened or endangered species, as well as species that may become listed in the future that may occur in connection with construction and maintenance activities associated with current and future LCRA TSC electrical transmission lines and related facilities.

As part of this process, the Service will evaluate the impacts on the human environment associated with alternatives associated with issuing the ITP to LCRA TSC. The Service will consider the proposed issuance of an ITP, supported by an HCP and a no action alternative. We are requesting public comment on the scope of the issues that the Service should consider in its environmental review of the proposed permit under NEPA.

Written comments on alternatives and issues to be addressed must be received by the close of business on August 30, 2017, and may be submitted to the Service using one of the following methods, please reference LCRA TSC NEPA:

- *Email:* FW2_AUES_Consult@fws.gov;
- *U.S. Mail:* Field Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Ste. 200, Austin, Texas 78758; or
- *Fax:* (512) 490-0974.

During the 30-day public comment period, four public scoping meetings are planned. The scoping meetings will provide information on the proposed ITP and give members of the public the opportunity to ask questions and provide comments on potential issues and alternatives that should be included for consideration in the Service's environmental review. The dates and locations for the meetings are:

- August 14 - Owen R. Hopkins Library, 3202 McKinzie Road, Corpus Christi, TX, 5-7 p.m.
- August 15 - LCRA Dalchau Service Center, 3505 Montopolis Drive, Bldg. A, Austin, TX, 6-8 p.m.
- August 17 - MLK Community Center, 2300 Butternut Lane, Midland, TX, 6-8 p.m.
- August 21 - Staybridge Suites, 1405 University Drive E., College Station, TX, 6-8 p.m.

Additional information on the project is available at the Service's Austin Ecological Services Office web site, <https://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>; by contacting Erik Huebner, Lower Colorado River Authority, Sr. Environmental Coordinator, (512) 730-8916, erik.huebner@lcra.org; or by visiting the project website at www.lcra.org/itp.

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