FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Establishing Additional Populations of the Federally Endangered Mohave Tui Chub in the Mojave Desert, Kern, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino Counties, California

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and cooperating agencies (Agencies) propose to establish additional populations of the Mohave tui chub (*Siphateles bicolor mohavensis*) in the Mojave Desert in California. Establishing additional populations would contribute to the conservation of the Mohave tui chub. It is also the primary criterion identified in the *Recovery Plan for the Mohave Tui Chub* (USFWS 1984) to downlist the Mohave tui chub to threatened. The Agencies have identified locations where these populations could be established that are described and analyzed in the environmental assessment (EA). However, there may be additional locations where populations could be established or that may not currently meet the criteria for ensuring the long-term viability of populations of Mohave tui chubs, but with minor changes these locations would in the future. Therefore, this document also describes and analyzes impacts to generic locations. If any additional specific locations meet the descriptions and analysis of generic locations in this environmental assessment, those locations for establishing additional populations of Mohave tui chubs would be covered by this EA.

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

The USFWS prepared an EA (copy enclosed) with four alternatives.

- Alternative A or the status quo alternative describes the current level of management. No Mohave tui chubs would be captured and no new populations would be established. The populations at Zzyzx (MC Spring and Lake Tuendae), the Lark Seep complex, Camp Cady Wildlife Area (Camp Cady), and Deppe Pond would continue to be managed and monitored by Mojave National Preserve, China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and the Lewis Center, respectively, with assistance from the CDFG and USFWS. The status of the Mohave tui chub would remain endangered with no progress toward recovery.
- Alternative B would establish additional Mohave tui chub populations at existing aquatic habitats. Specific habitats identified include Morning Star Mine Pond (Mojave National Preserve); Deep Creek, Holcomb Creek (San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF)); golf course pond (Edwards Air Force Base (EAFB)); and Victor Valley College pond. In addition, other aquatic habitat locations may be included in this alternative if they meet the analysis of a generic location.
- Alternative C would establish additional Mohave tui chub populations at newly created/modified aquatic habitats. Specific habitats identified include Coxey Pond (SBNF), Piute Ponds (EAFB), and New Pond at Camp Cady (CDFG). As with Alternative B, other aquatic habitat locations may be included in this alternative if they meet the analysis of a generic location.
- Alternative D would establish additional Mohave tui chub populations at existing and newly created/modified aquatic habitats (Alternatives B and C combined).

Selection of Alternative to Implement
The analysis in the EA demonstrates that Alternative D, establishing additional populations at existing and newly created/modified aquatic habitats provides the greatest ability to achieve the USFWS's goal for the Mohave tui chub in a timely manner while minimizing impacts to other endangered, threatened, proposed, candidate, and fully-protected species; increases/enhances aquatic habitat while minimizing impacts to upland desert habitat; and minimizing impacts to recreational fishing.

The preferred alternative would occur at various locations within the general historical range of the Mohave tui chub in the Mojave Desert of California with the goal of establishing additional populations as described in the Recovery Plan for the Mohave tui chub. Additional populations would be established only at the locations of willing landowners. All required permits and permissions would be obtained prior to implementing the preferred alternative. Trapping, transportation, and release of Mohave tui chubs would be conducted according to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), California Endangered Species Act, and California Fish and Game Code 5515. The population introductions would be accomplished through cooperative planning, implementation, and management with various Federal, State, and local agencies and interested parties.

Many safeguards would be implemented during site selection, translocation, and post-introduction activities to avoid and/or minimize potential impacts of this action on the human environment (Measure to Mitigate Adverse Effects) including the Mohave tui chub. Some of these include:

- selecting additional sites within the native or historical habitat whenever possible;
- restricting the release of Mohave tui chubs to sites that fulfill the life history requirements of the species;
- prohibiting the release of Mohave tui chubs into areas where other endemic taxa could be adversely affected;
- restricting the release of Mohave tui chubs to sites that have safeguards in place to ensure that tui chubs are not injured or killed during the operation/use of the aquatic site;
- obtaining Mohave tui chubs of sufficient number for translocation and which reflect the genetic composition of the species;
- implementing actions to avoid the transport of non-native species and pathogens from the source site to the receiving site; and
- introducing Mohave tui chubs under the most favorable conditions.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management
The USFWS, in coordination with the Agencies and the landowner, would collect and review the monitoring data on the Mohave tui chub populations and habitats (e.g., water quality, water depth, surface area, substrate, cover, invasive species, etc.). After 6 consecutive years of monitoring, if the results indicate a growing or stable population of Mohave tui chubs with recruitment occurring and acceptable physical, chemical, and ecological habitat parameters, population monitoring would be conducted a minimum of every other year. If at any time, the monitoring results indicate an adverse change or decline in habitat condition or population size

or trend, population monitoring would increase and adaptive management would be implemented to halt the population/habitat decline. A decline in population size or trend would occur when using two standard deviations, there is a decline in a population from the previous sampling event.

For adaptive management, the Agencies would periodically review, evaluate, and revise research, monitoring, and management activities to ensure progress toward recovery of the Mohave tui chub. Monitoring will determine the success and future direction of the proposal to establish additional populations. As each population is established or relevant findings verified, new information may identify additional or alternative methods, research, or recovery actions that may be needed.

Environmental Consequences

Implementation of the USFWS's decision would likely result in the following effects to the human environment. From implementation of Alternative D, the impacts to endangered, threatened, candidate, and fully-protected species would be a beneficial moderate increase to Mohave tui chubs and no change or negligible impacts to other protected species. Impacts to aquatic habitat/essential habitat would be a minimal increase in aquatic habitat (up to 2 acres at each site) and negligible increase or decrease in wetland habitat per site with a cumulative increase in wetland habitat. For recreational fishing, impacts would be a minimal decrease in areas where fishing would occur.

Measures to mitigate adverse impacts under NEPA (including avoidance) have been incorporated into the proposal. For endangered, threatened, candidate, and fully-protected species, these include altering the timing, location, design, and/or method of construction/management. For example, if a project could be implemented either at a previously disturbed location or undisturbed location, the undisturbed location would be avoided. This will likely have few to no new impacts to endangered, threatened, candidate, and fully-protected species. We have completed an internal consultation on the preferred alternative under section 7 of the ESA and have developed measures to avoid or minimize take of federally listed, proposed, and candidate species. No activities would be conducted in proposed or designated critical habitat.

The proposal is not expected to have a significant adverse effect on wetlands or floodplains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988. Although modifications to existing aquatic habitats would occur and these likely include wetlands, implementation of the preferred alternative would result in an overall increase in wetland habitat from the creation of new aquatic habitat. Although some of the projects would occur in floodplains, the projects would not impede the function or change the area of the floodplain.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant effects on the human environment. The impacts were analyzed with respect to context and intensity using significance criteria developed for each resource area. Impacts ranged from moderate beneficial to minimal adverse. The references that were used to prepare the EA follow section 5.0 of the EA.

Public Involvement
The proposal has been coordinated with local, State, and Federal agencies and Tribes. Public outreach included posting the EA on various agency websites, and mailing letters with copies of the EA to several tribes and public libraries in the project area. Information on public involvement, comment letters, and responses to comments is in Appendix E of the EA.

The proposal complies with all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders (EOs). Please see Appendix C of the EA for a complete discussion of these laws, regulations, and EOs.

Finding of No Significant Impact
The analysis in the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment from implementing the preferred alternative, Alternative D (establish additional Mohave tui chub populations at existing and newly created/modified aquatic habitats). Based on my review and evaluation of the enclosed EA and other supporting documentation, I have determined that Alternative D does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended) and 40 CFR 1508.27. As such, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision
I have carefully reviewed the EA and input from the public involvement process. I believe the issues identified in the EA would be best addressed through Alternative D because it offers the greatest flexibility in achieving effectiveness while minimizing cumulative impacts on the quality of the human environment with respect to the issues presented for consideration in this process. The USFWS will implement the preferred alternative in compliance with standard operating procedures. The EA identifies several alternatives, analyzes their effects on the human environment, and supports this finding. It is available upon request from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, California 93003 (Telephone 805-644-1766).

9/12/11
Date

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Enclosure