

comprise a cluster of cavity trees occupied by the group. Other cavities that are abandoned, inactive, or under construction may also occur in the cluster. RCWs forage for invertebrates on pine trees within and surrounding the cluster. Birds usually forage on larger and older pines. The foraging area will vary in size depending upon habitat quality, but birds generally forage within a one-half mile radius of the cluster.

Suitable habitat in the southern pine forest also consists of a vegetation structure affected by and maintained by fire. Encroachment of fire intolerant hardwoods into the forest midstory, particularly within clusters, can cause RCWs to abandon cluster and foraging habitat.

The number of RCW groups persisting today represents about 1 percent of the historical population that occupied the pre-Columbian southern pine forest. The decline of the RCW was initiated by the deforestation of the fire-maintained southern pine ecosystem at the turn of this century. Subsequent habitat loss and fragmentation has been caused by urbanization, fire exclusion, and forest management practices. Where forests exist today, most are either unsuitable or uninhabited by RCWs due to short harvest rotations, clear cutting, infrequently prescribed fire, and insufficient cluster and foraging habitat.

About 44 RCW groups inhabit land owned by the Applicant in south-central Arkansas. In the Draft RCW Procedures Manual for Private Lands (Draft Manual), the Service has proposed minimum forest management guidelines to avoid taking RCWs. The Draft Manual's recommendations provide the minimum quantitative and qualitative standards to avoid harm and harassment as a result of modifying RCW foraging and cluster habitat. The Applicant's HCP will provide cluster and foraging habitat in excess of that minimally recommended in the Draft Manual. Minimum foraging habitat guidelines recommend 3,000 ft² of pine basal area (≥ 10" DBH) within a 0.5 mile radius area of each active cluster. The Applicant's plan, which relies on uneven-aged forest management and select harvesting, currently provides an average of 8,188 ft² pine basal area for each RCW cluster. This quantity is about 2.7 times the minimum recommendation, and is about 96 percent of the amount (8,490 ft²) the Service has established for foraging habitat on Federal lands at the higher standard of RCW recovery-level management. As the Applicant's foraging stands become fully stocked by the all-aged management objective, a

target of 14,596 ft² of basal area may be obtained, about 1.7 times the amount recommended in the Service's RCW recovery plan.

Cluster management in the HCP involves measures to identify, mark, and map cavity trees, using an integrated Geographic Information System. Within each cluster, the Applicant will control hardwood encroachment, provide suitable replacement cavity trees, and prohibit the cutting of any active or inactive cavity tree. Active cavity trees lost due to natural factors such as lightning and wind will be replaced using artificial cavity inserts. Also, cavity restrictor plates will be installed when cavities are threatened by pileated woodpecker activity. The number of breeding pairs and the status of each cavity tree and cluster (active vs. inactive) will be determined every 3 years by the Applicant's monitoring and survey program.

The HCP also establishes annual employee training to effectively implement all elements of the plan. Such training includes the field identification of cavity trees, the provisions of records and monitoring, and all other elements of cluster and foraging habitat management.

An accidental harvest of a cavity tree associated with an unknown cluster is possible, though the Service believes the HCP minimizes such a chance. Even so, the net expected effect of the HCP and ITP is that the RCW population will either be sustained or increased. The EA considers the environmental consequences of two alternatives; issue the requested permit as conditioned by the HCP, or take no action (deny permit). The Service finds the greatest conservation benefits accompany the HCP and proposed permit. RCW management according to minimum private landowner guidelines, accompanying permit denial, would provide less conservation benefit. The Service's proposed alternative is to issue the requested ITP, based upon the submitted HCP. The principal environmental consequence of permit issuance is to sustain or enhance the status of the RCW, via implementation and funding the mitigation and minimization measures as outlined above.

Dated: October 23, 1995.

Noreen K. Clough,
Regional Director.

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Minerals Management Service

Minerals Management Advisory Board, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), Scientific Committee (SC); Announcement of Plenary Session

This Notice is issued in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, Public Law 92-463, 5 U.S.C., Appendix I, and the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-63, Revised.

The Minerals Management Advisory Board OCS SC will meet in plenary sessions on Wednesday, November 29, and Thursday, November 30, 1995, at the Washington Dulles Airport Hilton, 13869 Park Center Road, Herndon, Virginia 22071, telephone (703) 478-2900.

The OCS SC is an outside group of scientists which advises the Director, MMS, on the feasibility, appropriateness, and scientific value of the MMS, OCS Environmental Studies Program (ESP).

Below is a schedule of meetings that will occur.

The SC will meet in plenary session on Wednesday, November 29, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The Committee will also meet in plenary session on Thursday, November 30, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Discussion will focus on:

- Committee Business and Resolutions.
- Environmental Studies Program Status Review.
- MMS Goals and Objectives.

The meetings are open to the public. Approximately 30 visitors can be accommodated on a first-come-first-served basis at the plenary session.

A copy of the agenda may be requested from the MMS by writing Ms. Phyllis Clark at the address below.

Other inquiries concerning the OCS SC meeting should be addressed to Dr. Ken Turgeon, Executive Secretary to the OCS Scientific Committee, Minerals Management Service, 381 Elden Street, Mail Stop 4310, Herndon, Virginia 22070. He may be reached by telephone at (703) 787-1717.

Dated: October 18, 1995.

Thomas Gernhofer,
Associate Director for Offshore Minerals Management.

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Summary of Minerals Management Service Workshops on Expanded Use of Royalty-In-Kind (RIK) Procedures

AGENCY: Minerals Management Service, Interior.