

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Fish and Wildlife Service****50 CFR Part 17****Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Notice of Finding on Petition to List the Rocky Mountain Population of the Trumpeter Swan**

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of petition finding.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces a 90-day petition finding for a petition to amend the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. The petitioner did not present substantial information that listing the Rocky Mountain population of the trumpeter swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) as threatened may be warranted.

**DATES:** The finding announced in this notice was approved on March 23, 1990.

**ADDRESSES:** Questions or comments concerning this finding should be sent to: Chief, Endangered Species and Environmental Contaminants, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, P.O. Box 25486, Denver Federal Center, Denver, Colorado 80225. The petition, finding, and supporting data are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above office at 134 Union Boulevard, Lakewood, Colorado.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Olin E. Bray at the Denver address (303/236-7398 or FTS 776-7398).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Background**

Section 4(b)(3)(A) of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), requires that the Service make a finding on whether a petition to list, delist, or reclassify a species presents substantial scientific or commercial information to demonstrate that the petitioned action may be warranted. To the maximum extent practicable, this finding is to be made within 90 days of receipt of the petition, and the finding is to be published

promptly in the **Federal Register**. If the finding is positive, the Service is also required to promptly commence a review of the status of the involved species.

**Petition:** The Service has received and made a 90-day finding on the following petition:

A petition dated April 7, 1989, was received from the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society on May 12, 1989. The petition requested the Service to list the Rocky Mountain population of the trumpeter swan as a threatened species. The petition defines the Rocky Mountain population as all known breeding flocks in the Greater Yellowstone area (the tri-State subpopulation), and in Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, southeastern Yukon, and Saskatchewan (the Interior Canada subpopulation).

Prior to settlement of North America by Europeans, the trumpeter swan was a migratory species that ranged across most of the United States and Canada. The species was extirpated from most of its historical range by about 1900. A remnant population of trumpeter swans survived in western Canada and the Greater Yellowstone area, and provided the nucleus to rebuild trumpeter swan numbers in North America. Trumpeter swan numbers have increased since restoration efforts for the species began earlier in the century. Most of the trumpeter swans in the Rocky Mountain population winter in the tri-State area. Surveys in February 1989, documented the highest number of trumpeter swans (approximately 1,750) on the wintering grounds since restoration efforts began.

The petition states that although population numbers have been increasing, the Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans is extremely vulnerable to severe declines, due in part, to its restricted winter distribution. A single event of disease or adverse environmental conditions at one or more of the limited number of wintering sites could result in severe population impacts. As evidence of the trumpeter swan's vulnerability, the petition documented the loss of at least 50 birds (carcasses collected) last winter presumably due to extremely cold weather and low water flows. Other threats listed in the petition included continued loss or curtailment of habitat due to inadequate water flows, human activity and loss of wetlands; inadequate regulatory mechanisms; and mortality from lead poisoning, powerline collisions, and accidental shootings.

**Service Information:** The Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans is believed to be distinct from other populations of trumpeter swans; the Pacific Coast population and the

interior population. There was some question as to whether the Rocky Mountain population was distinct from the Pacific Coast population, but there are no band return data or observations of collared birds to suggest interbreeding between the two populations (pers. comm.: Danny Bystrack, Rod King, and Carl Mitchell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Dave Moody, Wyoming Game and Fish Department).

Winter habitat is believed to be the limiting factor in Rocky Mountain population trumpeter swan restoration efforts (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1984). Approximately 509 trumpeters (about 30 percent of the Rocky Mountain population) winter on the Henrys Fork of the Snake River (Henrys Fork) at or near Harriman State Park, Idaho. Insufficient water flows to maintain ice-free conditions during extremely cold weather have resulted in the loss of feeding areas for trumpeters. Hazing efforts during November and December of 1988 to move trumpeters away from Harriman State Park prior to extremely cold weather were unsuccessful. For reasons unknown at this time, trumpeters do not leave Harriman State Park and migrate to other wintering areas when the Henrys Fork freezes over. Therefore, the lack of sufficient flows results in the curtailment of important winter habitat.

Although not documented, the actual loss of trumpeters on the Henrys Fork in February 1989, is estimated to be as high as 200 birds (Carl Mitchell, pers. comm.). Even though the documented loss of birds at or near Harriman State Park was fairly low considering total population numbers, the estimated loss is approximately 11 percent of the population. Certain flocks appear to have endured much of that loss. The Grand Prairie flock, the largest Canadian flock in the population, had an estimated overwinter death rate of 48 percent this past winter, compared to an average rate of 24 percent (Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Subcommittee).

Production levels for Rocky Mountain population trumpeters in Canada have been increasing in recent years. In 1989 following the previous winter's die off, the number of pairs in the Grand Prairie flock was 18 percent below 1988 levels, and the number of nests was 16 percent below 1988 levels. Production was below that in 1988, but above the 5-year average. Production levels were below average for Montana and Idaho (Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Subcommittee), and slightly above average for Wyoming (Dave Moody, pers. comm.).

The congregation of approximately 30 percent of the population in a small area at Harriman State Park and large congregations at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and other wintering areas within the tri-State area leave the trumpeters vulnerable to disease.

Management efforts currently underway (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1984) are attempting to expand trumpeter swan winter range within a 150-mile radius of the tri-State wintering area, and initial results appear promising. Successful range expansion could alleviate the need for continued emphasis on water flows at Harriman State Park. It would decrease the population's vulnerability to disease. Regions 1 and 6 of the Service are committed to increasing efforts to expand the winter range of the Rocky Mountain population of the trumpeter swan. The Refuges and Wildlife Divisions in both Regions have increased their range expansion programs. The program is currently progressing quite well, especially in Wyoming where the State has taken a very active role. However, range expansion is a long term process, and without a sufficient minimum flow in the Henrys Fork, curtailment of feeding areas at Harriman State Park will continue to be a threat to trumpeter swan winter habitat until range expansion efforts are completed.

To address the threat of insufficient minimum flows in the Henrys Fork to maintain the swans wintering there, a committee consisting of personnel from the Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Idaho State University met to establish the minimum flow needed to maintain adequate winter habitat for swans on the Henrys Fork. They established a minimum flow figure of 500 cfs below the Buffalo River. Assuming an average flow of 200 cfs from the Buffalo River, 300 cfs would have to be released from Island Park Reservoir (on the Henrys Fork) to maintain the 500 cfs minimum flow.

Subsequent to the establishment of the 500 cfs minimum flow, the historic flow records for the past 16 years (1974-1989) at the Island Park gaging station were reviewed. This review showed that there was sufficient water to maintain the 500 cfs minimum flow during 6 to 16 years. During the other 10 years, additional water would have to have been released to maintain the 500 cfs. It is believed that sufficient water would have been available for purchase and thus released during most of those 10 years.

A review of the midwinter trumpeter swan survey results for the past 16 years show that the number of swans counted increased from 709 in 1974, to a high of 1,743 in 1989. Some of this increase is probably due to an increase in survey effort, but it is believed that during this period, the Rocky Mountain population has maintained an upward trend. At a meeting in January 1990, Service waterfowl biologists indicated that the effects of last winter's die off and lower production in 1989 will only be temporary and that the upward trend of the population should continue.

Now that the minimum flow level has been established, the Service has made a commitment to make every effort to purchase the necessary water during those winters when the minimum flow below the Buffalo River drops below 500 cfs. Since the Service is committed to try to purchase the necessary water to maintain a minimum flow of 500 cfs during the winter, it is believed that the major threat to the population has been alleviated. By removing this threat, it will provide the Service with the necessary time to expand the winter range of the species to where it is sufficiently widespread that a catastrophic event in any one part of the population's range will not threaten the existence of the population.

After review of the petition, accompanying documentation, references cited therein, and other information obtained, the Service found that the petition presented information insufficient to conclude that the requested action may be warranted.

#### References Cited

- Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Subcommittee. 1989. Report to the Pacific Flyway Study Committee. Idaho Department of Fish and Game. 2pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1984. North American Management Plan for Trumpeter Swans. Prepared by the Trumpeter Swan Subcommittees for the Flyway Councils, Canadian Wildlife Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Office of Migratory Bird Management, Washington, DC 62pp.

#### Author

This notice was prepared by Olin E. Bray (see ADDRESSES).

#### Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1543).

#### List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and threatened species,  
Fish, Marine mammals, Plants  
(agriculture).

Dated: April 19, 1990.

**Bruce Blanchard,**

*Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

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