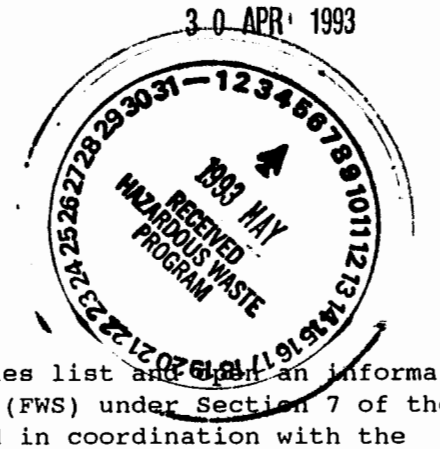
DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

HEADQUARTERS 49TH FIGHTER WING (ACC)
HOLLOMAN AIR FORCE BASE, NEW MEXICO

FROM: 49 CES/CEV
550 Tabosa Ave
Holloman AFB, New Mexico 88330-8458



SUBJ: Section 7 Consultation for Sewage Lagoons

TO: Jennifer Fowler-Propst
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
Suite D, 3530 Pan American HWY NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107

1. Holloman AFB (HAFB) wishes to request a species list and open an informal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. This action is initiated in coordination with the Caballo Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management-Las Cruces District (BLM) (Atch 1). Several actions by HAFB concerning wastewater facilities, both in the past and in the future, may affect threatened and endangered species. These actions include (1) past practices that led to the designation of the sewage lagoons as hazardous waste management units under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); (2) closure of the lagoons to resolve violations of RCRA, and (3) construction and operation of a new wastewater treatment plant.

2. Past operation of the seven HAFB sewage lagoons resulted in contamination of groundwater with low levels of benzene hexachloride. Sludge and sediments of the downstream lagoons and the receiving water, Lake Holloman, are contaminated with low levels of benzene hexachloride and other organochlorine pesticides. Several inorganic constituents in the sludge exceed background levels, including arsenic, barium, copper, lead, and zinc. These findings are detailed in "Assessment Monitoring Results: Appendix IX and Confirmation Sampling," April 1992, Radian Corp, and in "Site Characterization Report," August 1992, Radian Corp, which are available from HAFB upon request.

3. Wastewater from HAFB has augmented habitat for migratory waterfowl in natural playas near the southwest corner of the base. Three water bodies provide distinctive habitats for a variety of waterfowl and shore birds (Atch 1). Lagoon G, located on HAFB, and Lake Holloman, located on land administered by BLM, are formed by damming natural playas and are permanently inundated. The overflow from Lake Holloman provides seasonal flow into another natural playa known as Lake Stinky, also located on BLM land. The other six lagoons (A-F) are artificial structures with lined banks, although there is some use by waterfowl.

4. Plans are now under way to replace the lagoons with a modern sewage treatment plant discharging effluent to Lake Holloman and to new evaporation lagoons. The old lagoons are planned to be closed and overflow to Lake Stinky is to be eliminated. The closure of the lagoons is required to resolve RCRA violations. The exact form of the closure (i.e., are the lagoons to be completely abandoned, or, are they not to be used for primary wastewater

treatment) is unknown pending the completion of a feasibility study during 1993 and technical review by NMED during 1994. The elimination of overflow to Lake Stinky is in response to past complaints about odors from the public and from New Mexico Environment Department. There are also concerns about the long-term stability of the non-engineered Lake Holloman Dam which can be partly resolved by lowering the water level of Lake Holloman and eliminating overflow to Lake Stinky. At this writing, the Albuquerque District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) is working with an Architect Engineering firm to award a contract for design of a new wastewater treatment plant. Obviously, the nature of the treated effluent and the method of its disposal will impact wildlife habitat and possibly endangered species.

5. In summary, the past operation of the HAFB lagoons has created wildlife habitat but may have endangered wildlife through contamination. Future activities may eliminate water and associated wildlife habitat from lagoon G and from Lake Stinky. New lagoons, which will be constructed and possibly lined, will be added. The nutrient content of the wastewater will be reduced, but to what degree is unknown, pending negotiation of a NPDES permit.

6. HAFB believes much of the data necessary to evaluate the effects of (1) past operation of the lagoons, (2) closure of the lagoons, and (3) construction and operation of a new wastewater treatment plant already exists or is currently being collected. FWS sampled waterfowl and other biota for contamination during 1991 and presumably the analyses of these results are nearing completion. The Omaha District of ACE has contracted Radian corporation to sample contamination in lower trophic levels and other biota not sampled by FWS. These results will be reported in May, 1993. BLM and the Mesilla Valley Audubon Society maintain records of species occurrences.

7. HAFB requests FWS provide guidance regarding a Section 7 consultation. Please direct questions to Dr. Fred M. Fisher or Mr. Martyn Tagg at 505 479-5040/3931.

Howard E. Moffitt

HOWARD E. MOFFITT
Deputy Base Civil Engineer

1 Atch
BLM Coordination Letter

cc: w/Atch

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Rec'd 3/15/93 # 49 CES/CEV

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess St.
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88005

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1703
6840 (037)

MAR 12 1993

Mr. Frederick M. Fisher
Ecologist
U.S. Air Force - Environmental Flight
CES/CEV
Holloman Air Force Base, NM 88330-8457

Dear Mr. Fisher:

I am writing to request that Holloman Air Force Base begin discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine the need to enter into a Section 7 Consultation on issues regarding endangered wildlife on Lake Holloman and Lake Stinky.

Holloman Air Force Base is operating a waste water treatment facility which has discharged effluent into a series of lagoon impoundments located on the Base, and into a playa lake. This playa was dammed to create Lake Holloman and Lake Stinky. These lakes are located on land administered by both the Bureau of Land Management and Holloman Air Force Base. Previous groundwater, soil, and sludge sampling have confirmed the presence of Benzene Hexachloride (an organochlorine pesticide) and a variety of metals including arsenic, barium, copper, lead, and zinc. Further detection sampling will verify the extent of contamination and the impact on the surrounding environment. There is evidence that some of these chemicals are present in quantities and forms that could bioaccumulate in wildlife and may be transportable in the carbon cycle.

Lake Holloman and Lake Stinky are highly visible to the public and are recognized bird viewing areas. The presence of the large expanse of water in a desert situation is very attractive to migrating birds and other animals. Because of this, a number of endangered species have been recorded as occurring or are expected to occur at these lakes during at least part of the year. Species of concern occurring at the Lakes that are potentially impacted by toxic substances include:

FEDERALLY ENDANGERED
- Peregrine Falcon
- Aplomado Falcon
- Bald Eagle

ATCH 1

FEDERAL CANDIDATES FOR LISTING

Longbilled Curlew
Southwest Willow Flycatcher
Ferruginous Hawk
White Faced Ibis
Western Snowy Plover - species nests at Lake Stinky

STATE ENDANGERED

Olivaceous Cormorant
Common Ground Dove

The Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to consult with the USFWS on any action funded or carried out by an agency that may jeopardize the continued existence of a listed endangered or threatened species. Currently, sampling data indicate hazardous substances may occur in and around the lakes. Due to the presence of listed species using the area and the possibility that animal systems may be impacted, we believe it would be prudent to consult with the USFWS at this time.

Since your agency is actively using the area and is also working to resolve contamination issues, I ask that you take the lead in completing the consultation. Also, because species listed by the State of New Mexico are also likely to be present, I recommend you coordinate with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish as well. The BLM would like to be kept informed on the progress of the consultations. We have data on wildlife species occurrence at the lakes that may be of use in the consultation process.

Thank you for consideration of this matter. We appreciate the cooperation and openness of your staff on past dealings regarding resolution of the contamination problems with the sewage system. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Tim Sanders at (505) 525-4393.

Sincerely,

Timothy M. Murphy
Area Manager
Caballo Resource Area

cc:
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ecological Services
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Albuquerque, NM 87107

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