



United States Department of the Interior

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WY-4304
ENV-7.00

AUG 24 2016

Ms. Eliza Hines
Assistant Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Nebraska Ecological Services Field Office
9325 B South Alda Road
Wood River, NE 68883-9565

Subject: Request for Informal Consultations Regarding the Northern Long Eared Bat (NLEB) and the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP)

Dear Ms. Hines

This letter serves as a request for informal consultation related to potential land management actions undertaken by the PRRIP. The PRRIP began in 2007 and was developed to offset adverse effects to federally listed species in the central Platte River and surrounding lands. On April 2, 2015, the NLEB was federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to declines caused by white-nose syndrome (WNS) and continued spread of the disease. On January 14, 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a final 4(d) rule that exempts certain activities from the take prohibition within the WNS zone. The PRRIP associated habitat reach (AHR) is almost entirely encompassed within the WNS zone in Nebraska and actions undertaken by the PRRIP have the potential to adversely affect the NLEB.

The Federal Action pertaining to this informal consultation is the continuing implementation and funding of the PRRIP and activities it undertakes. Specifically, based on guidance provided on the Service website for NLEB and the key found therein¹, it appears PRRIP land management actions involving tree removal may affect the NLEB. Incidental take from tree removal activities is not prohibited unless it results from removing a known occupied maternity roost tree or from tree removal activities within 150 feet of a known occupied maternity roost tree from June 1 through July 31 or results from tree removal activities within 0.25 mile of a hibernaculum at any time.

The PRRIP has determined it will rely on the programmatic biological opinion for the final 4(d) rule in order to fulfill their project-specific ESA section 7 responsibilities and agree to the framework described below. While this framework is optional, if the PRRIP chooses not to follow the framework, standard section 7 consultation procedures apply.

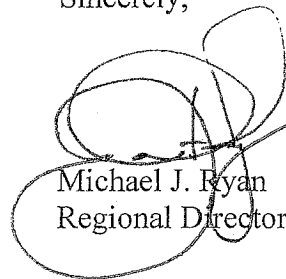
¹ <https://www.fws.gov/Midwest/endangered/mammals/nleb/KeyFinal4dNLEB.html>

We have determined the following related to NLEB: 1) no known hibernacula (caves) are within the AHR; 2) summer maternity roost habitat exists; and 3) impacts to this type of habitat while the bats are present could result in incidental take. Due to the absence of previously documented hibernacula, we have determined (based on Service guidance) that take can be avoided by adopting the following conservation measure:

All tree removal² activities will be avoided from June 1- July 31.

On June 8, 2016, the Governance Committee of the PRRIP formally agreed to adopt this conservation measure. Therefore, we believe that PRRIP activities may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect the NLEB. We request a written response from the Service documenting concurrence with this determination and concluding informal consultation.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Ryan
Regional Director

cc: Michael Thabault
Assistant Regional Director
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Mountain Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, CO 80228-1807

Dr. Jerry Kenny
Executive Director
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GP-1100, WY-4304

² "'Tree removal'" is defined in the 4(d) rule as cutting down, harvesting, destroying, trimming, or manipulating in any other way the trees, saplings, snags, or any other form of woody vegetation likely to be used by northern long-eared bats."