



P.O. Box 216 Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601

November 26, 2013

Jennifer Norris
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
2800 Cottage Way
Room W-2605
Sacramento, CA 95825

Re: Request for 90-Day Extension of Comment Period for Proposed Threatened Status for the Western Distinct Population Segment of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) (78 Fed. Reg. 61622)

Dear Ms. Norris:

The Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) requests a ninety day extension of the comment period on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed rule listing the western population of the yellow-billed cuckoo as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The notice of the proposed rule published in the Federal Register on October 3, 2013 requests comments within sixty days, by December 2, 2013. The Alliance has members who would like to submit relevant scientific data relating to the matters discussed in the notice, but those parties need more time to do so than the December 2 deadline allows. The Alliance requests that the deadline for comment be extended to March 3, 2014.

The Family Farm Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and allied industries in the 17 continental states located west of the 100th meridian. The Alliance is focused on one mission: To ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers.

The Federal Register Notice (notice) notes that the geographical breeding range of the yellow-billed cuckoo in western North America includes suitable habitat areas west of the crest of the Rocky Mountains in the United States including the upper and middle Rio Grande, the Colorado River Basin, the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems, and the Columbia River system. Eastern yellow-billed cuckoos breed east of the Rocky Mountains, including areas north to North Dakota and south to eastern Mexico. These areas envelop the core of the membership of our organization.

The notice makes a number of statements about effects of habitat loss from manmade features that alter watercourse hydrology so that the natural processes that sustained riparian habitat in western North America are “greatly diminished”. The notice further states that loss and degradation of habitat has also occurred as a result of “livestock overgrazing” and “encroachment from agriculture”. According to the notice, habitat elsewhere in the range continues to be vulnerable to loss and degradation from ongoing alterations in agricultural activities. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has opined that the decline of the western yellow-billed cuckoo is primarily the result of the long-lasting effects of habitat loss and modification from altered hydrology resulting from “decades of dam construction, channelization, water extraction, and other activities”. Other threats - according to the notice - include loss of habitat to agricultural and other land uses, overgrazing, exposure to pesticides, and other stressors.

These alleged stressors - and actions taken to address them - have a very direct and significant impact on the Western farmers and ranchers we represent.

The members of our association need more time to adequately assess these conclusions and research relevant data to provide to USFWS in response. It is important that the USFWS decision regarding listing - and any conclusions about the effects of water management and agricultural operations on the Yellow-billed cuckoo - be based on the best available scientific data and acknowledge the limitations and uncertainty given the available data.

The potential impacts of the proposed listing have serious ramifications for the family farmers and ranchers of the West. Of course, the precise regulation of water management and other activities that would follow from a decision to list is uncertain at this time. However, based on implementation of agency actions directed on other listed species - the Delta smelt (California), coho salmon (Northern California and Southern Oregon), waterfowl and sturgeon (Platte River), to name just a few - our farmers and ranchers know firsthand how an ESA listing can impact rural communities. With that said, the apparent potential impact of the proposed listing of yet another species on the water supply for farms and rural communities in the West warrants allowing more than sixty days for public comment.

I appreciate the consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Keppen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dan Keppen
Executive Director