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Salazar Announces Guidelines to Protect Endangered Indiana Bat from Surface Coal Mining Impacts

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced the availability of coal mining guidelines developed to conserve and protect the endangered Indiana bat. The bat’s habitat stretches from the eastern United States through the Midwest, including 13 states with coal mining operations.

“These guidelines provide coal mining companies a set of consistent and reasonable protective measures they can use when their proposed operations could impact the Indiana bat and its critical habitat,” Secretary Salazar said. “This technical guidance was developed through extensive state and federal collaboration and will assist companies in complying with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.”

A team representing three U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regions and state coal mining regulatory programs, facilitated by the U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, developed the guidelines to provide habitat protection and avoidance measures for the Indiana bat. State participation on the team and peer review of the guidelines were coordinated by the Interstate Mining Compact Commission, a multi-state organization representing the natural resource interests of its member states.

“These guidelines will standardize the review process, which in turn, will allow us to provide applicants with consistent, timely responses,” said Sam Hamilton, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “They are based on the best available science for the species and will help everyone involved comply with requirements found in the Endangered Species Act.”

The team developed the *Range-wide Indiana Bat Protection and Enhancement Plan (PEP) Guidelines* to assist surface mining applicants and state coal mining regulatory agencies with the process and to ensure protection of this species during coal mining

operations authorized under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of 1977. The guidelines fulfill the Fish and Wildlife Service 1996 Biological Opinion, which stated that coal mining activities regulated by SMCRA, if augmented by species-specific protective measures in each permit, would not jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species.

The PEP guidelines provide the species-specific protective measures with a set of options for coal mining applicants and regulatory agencies to use while developing mining permits within the range of the Indiana bat. A “cookbook” of enhancement and protection techniques, the guidelines will aid applicants and regulatory agencies in fulfilling Indiana bat protection measures early in the permit development process.

“These guidelines represent the culmination of important collaboration among the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Interstate Mining Compact Commission States, and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement,” said Glenda H. Owens, Acting Director, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. “They will provide protection for the Indiana bat and certainty for surface coal mine operators. The guidelines demonstrate what can be accomplished when different branches of government roll up their sleeves and work together,” she added.

“Bat Conservation International (BCI) has worked with federal and state officials for years to protect the Indiana bat, and we are pleased the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, the Interstate Mining Compact Commission, and state coal mining regulatory programs have worked together to create these guidelines that will help ensure improved and consistent decision making across state lines,” said Dave Waldien, Acting Executive Director, BCI. “BCI stands ready to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to adjust these guidelines and protocols as new information becomes available and as White-nose Syndrome continues to impact the Indiana bat,” he added, referring to the poorly understood malady associated with the deaths of hundreds of thousands of bats.

“The state coal mining regulatory authorities represented by the Interstate Mining Compact Commission are greatly encouraged by the development of the Indiana bat Protection and Enhancement Plan guideline document,” said Greg Conrad, Executive Director of IMCC. “The document reflects a compilation of best management practices and solid scientific approaches for species protection based on years of experience among both specialists and regulators. Given the challenges associated with the protection of this species, these guidelines will be particularly helpful during the permit review process as site-specific PEPs are developed and approved. The guidelines will also provide for a higher level of consistency in the field, which should benefit the regulated industry and other stakeholders.”

The Indiana bat is a medium-sized, insect-eating migratory bat. Females leave winter hibernation sites in the spring to form maternity colonies in wooded areas where they bear and raise their young. Surface mining operations could affect the Indiana bat when located near an Indiana bat hibernation site, maternity roost, or in forested areas that

could serve as foraging areas, roosting areas, or travel corridors. Areas populated with bats are documented by capture records, survey information, or other sources. Development of a Protection and Enhancement Plan is required when Indiana bat habitat will be impacted by coal mining activity.

To view the guidelines, visit:

<http://www.osmre.gov/guidance/docs/INBatPEPGuidelines.pdf>

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