

File Code: 5100; 2670
Date: May 26, 2017

Ms. Donna Wieting
Director, Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Ms. Wieting:

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is contacting the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to provide an update on the aerial application of long-term fire retardant project. As previously mentioned in my March 6, 2017 letter, there are several of our National Forests in the Western United States where the amount of incidental take authorized in the November 7, 2011 biological opinion has been met. The USFS is currently in pre-consultation/technical assistance with NMFS to re-initiate Section 7 consultation on a portion of the 2011 biological opinion to update the effects analysis and incidental take statement for the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and California.

Preliminary meetings and technical consultation have been occurring on a regular basis between the USFS and NMFS since January 2017 (meeting notes on file). Information shared between the agencies include monitoring data, updated (less toxic) formulations of retardant used, and preliminary findings of new fish toxicity studies by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Preparations are currently underway by the USFS for the 2017 fire season. As coordination and discussion between the agencies continues, it is apparent Section 7 regional re-initiation of consultation will not be completed prior to the upcoming 2017 fire season. The USFS and NMFS have been discussing additional protection measures on national forests where specific forests are at the limit of their authorized incidental take. Additional protection measures include doubling aerial fire retardant avoidance buffer widths to 600 feet during key spawning periods or locations.

The expanded 600 foot buffer width would be interim and in place for the 2017 fire season. These expanded buffer widths may be included as extra protection areas in the upcoming regionally re-initiated consultation.



Please contact staff Dave Haston (208) 387-5642 (dhaston@fs.fed.us), Julie Laufmann (970) 226-2040 (jlaufman@fs.fed.us), or Tracii Hickman (509) 522-6272 (thickman@fs.fed.us) if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

/s/Victoria Christiansen

VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN

Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry

cc: Shawna Legarza, Denise Blankenship, Lisa Elenz, Dave Haston, Julie Laufmann, Shirley Zylstra, Chris Worth, Colleen Madrid, Joseph Burns, Dan Shively, Patti Krueger, Lee Jacobson, John Chatel, Scott Spaulding, Jason Kahn, Cathy Tortorici