



EPA paper outlines plan to deal with impacts to endangered species

Jessica Estepa,
E&E reporter
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U.S. EPA yesterday released a white paper that outlines how it will work with other federal agencies to assess pesticide threats to endangered species.

EPA, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service will start using the “interim approaches” in 2014. One such step calls for discussions between the agencies to see how areas EPA is working on overlap with the ranges and designated critical habitats of endangered species and determining how species may be affected and possibly at jeopardy within such areas.

“The Agencies will work together to develop refined and improved techniques and approaches over time,” the white paper said.

The approaches come in response to a National Academy of Sciences report released earlier this year.

Under the Endangered Species Act, EPA is required to consult with FWS and NMFS to determine whether federal action could affect a listed species. But the report found this had resulted in duplicative review processes,

something that environmental and industry groups had raised concerns about (Greenwire, April 30).

The agencies will continue to work on the issues in the coming months, according to the white paper. This will include developing a common approach to data analyses, sharing databases and discussing a proposal for defining agricultural pesticide use areas.

Environmental group Center for Biological Diversity lauded the effort, saying it was an important move in the right direction to protecting threatened plants and animals from pesticides. Still, it is only a first step, Brett Hartl, the center’s endangered species policy director, said in a statement.

“The EPA needs to do much more to ensure this new plan results in meaningful, on-the-ground conservation actions to protect our most endangered species and their habitats,” Hartl said.

On the industry side, agribusiness trade group CropLife America noted that the interim approaches would require a lot of collaboration between agencies. Mike Leggett, the group’s senior director of environmental policy, wondered how implementation would actually work.

“It is entirely unclear where resources are coming from to facilitate the intimate level of interaction between the EPA and the Services envisioned in this document,” he said in a statement. “The white paper is light on critical information that would make clear the impact of proposed changes on registrants of plant protection products.”