California Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Pesticide Regulation

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PLAN RELEASED TO PROTECT ENDANGERED GOOSE

SACRAMENTO -- Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation today announced the completion of the first local plan issued by the Department's endangered species program.

"DPR set up its own endangered species program to replace one proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency," said DPR Assistant Director Ron Oshima. "The federal program would have imposed unnecessarily broad prohibitions on pesticide use, impeding economic growth while providing little if any additional environmental protection.

"Instead, we have set up local advisory committees of growers, biologists, pest management experts, state and federal wildlife agencies, and state pesticide officials. Their job is to come up with mitigation measures people can live with, and then apply them as broadly as necessary to ensure adequate protection of the target species."

The recently completed document, "Local Plan for Protection of Aleutian Canada Goose in Merced County," defines certain areas frequented by the goose in Merced County and establishes some recommended limitations on the use of pesticides to limit the goose's exposure.

The Aleutian Canada goose is listed as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. It spends the summer in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska and the winter in California's Central Valley. The bird is unusual in that it frequents agricultural fields, which makes it especially vulnerable to pesticide residues.

Local advisory groups are being set up in other counties where the goose is found, to develop protection measures keyed to each county's crops and habitats.

Oshima praised the process that brought this document about. "It confirms our belief that reasonable discussion at the local level can identify practical alterations in pesticide use to protect endangered species from pesticide exposure, while allowing

essential pest control.

"Growers and biologists examined detailed biological and other data to define precisely both the extent of possible pesticide exposure and of pest control needs. They could then craft mitigation measures that were not only appropriate, but feasible," Oshima said. "We plan to use this approach in dealing with many other endangered and threatened species."

The local plan was developed under a grant from USEPA. After review and approval by USEPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it will be included in the national Endangered Species Pesticide Protection Program.

The local plan designates a protected area of about 150,000 acres in western Merced County. USEPA had originally proposed designating over 400,000 acres in the county. The committee revised this protection area after reviewing specific historical records of locations actually visited by the geese. While the USEPA draft included prohibition of many pesticides widely used in the area, the local plan includes specific mitigation measures to limit pesticide exposure to the geese.

These include prohibition of use of 16 granular pesticides from September 1 to April 1. The measures would also prohibit use of certain other pesticides from November 15 to April 1, the period when the geese are present. Many of these pesticides would be allowed after crops have reached a uniform height of at least twelve inches, since these geese are reluctant to land in tall vegetation.

USEPA's Endangered Species Pesticide Protection Program is designed to make sure pesticides do not adversely affect endangered and threatened species. As part of this program, USEPA had proposed extensive pesticide restrictions, issuing bulletins for each county showing habitats and the pesticides prohibited in those areas. If implemented, these proposals would have drastically impacted the state's pest control practices, both within and outside agriculture.

To avert this, DPR proposed an alternate plan customized to the state's unique micro-habitats and varied cropping patterns. Under this interim plan, DPR developed accurate habitat maps and pesticide mitigation measures tailored to allowing needed pest control while providing protection to endangered species.

Under this plan, county habitat maps have been developed for over 185 federally listed endangered and threatened species. About half these maps are now being evaluated to learn the nature, likelihood and extent of possible pesticide exposure from surrounding land uses.

Where such exposure seems likely, DPR forms a local advisory group of growers and other land owners, expert biologists, pest management experts and representatives of regulatory agencies. This group is asked to review existing habitat and pesticide use information, and to recommend mitigation measures keyed to the kinds of pesticides used, the types of crops grown, and the distinctive hazards of certain pesticides to specific species. Protection plans are now under development in other counties for the Fresno kangaroo rat, California freshwater shrimp, and other endangered species.

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