



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

North Dakota Ecological Services
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Bismarck, North Dakota 58501-7926
(701) 250-4481, ndfieldoffice@fws.gov



IN REPLY REFER
TO:
PSC Freedom Mine
NACT-1801 REV
& Renewal

January 14, 2026

Mr. Jonathan Emmer
Director, Abandoned Mines Division
North Dakota Public Service Commission
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Dept. 408
Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0480

Dear Mr. Emmer:

Thank you for the email and letter communication dated January 7, 2026, requesting concurrence with effects determinations from the North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) regarding Revision 3 to Surface Coal Mining Permit NACT-1801 held by the North American Coal for the Freedom Mine in Mercer County, North Dakota. The revision updates various sections of the permit for the next 5-year permit term.

Section 7(a) (2) of the Endangered Species Act as amended, (16 USC 1531 et seq., [Act]) requires that each Federal agency, in consultation with the Secretary, ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. In fulfilling these requirements, each agency is to use the best scientific and commercial data available to assess the impacts of their action and make an effects determination. In this case, the PSC is acting as an agent for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) for the purposes of this consultation.

There is no requirement under the implementing regulations of the Endangered Species Act (50 CFR Part 402) for action agencies to receive FWS concurrence with “no effect” determinations, therefore the responsibility for the “no effect” determinations for Whooping crane (*Gus americana*), Rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) and Dakota skipper (*Hesperia dacotae*) remain with the PSC. Accordingly, we recommend the PSC retain the documentation in your decisional record for these federal actions.

The PSC may request conferencing on a voluntary basis for proposed species, which includes the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), Western regal fritillary (*Argynnis idalia occidentalis*) butterflies and Suckley's Cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*). We understand the PSC has made no effect determinations for these species and have not requested conferencing. At this time, we generally recommend that habitat within the project area be evaluated for these species prior to construction.

Pursuant to the implementing regulations of the Act (50 CFR 402.13), this letter concludes informal consultation. This consultation should be re-initiated if: (1) new information reveals effects of the action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not considered in this consultation; (2) the action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat that was not considered in this consultation; or (3) a new species is listed or critical habitat is designated that may be affected by this action.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure the conservation of listed and proposed species as part of our joint responsibilities under the Act. If you have any questions on these comments, please contact Jerry Reinisch of my staff at (701) 425-2133 or me at (720) 793-6797.

Sincerely,

LUKE
TOSO

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Luke Toso, Acting Field Office Supervisor