

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT WITH ASSURANCES PROGRAM, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BIG HOLE RIVER, MONTANA

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In 1999 the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) program was initiated by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service to engage private landowners in species conservation before a potential listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). For their

participation, private landowners receive assurances that they will not be subjected to additional regulatory burden should the species be listed. Hundreds or thousands of species are potentially eligible for this program, but only a few dozen CCAA's have been completed and the scope and complexity varies widely among individual agreements. Because the program is relatively new, there are little data to evaluate the biological effectiveness of CCAAs. However a few agreements can be considered a success in terms of landowner participation. Issuing permits under the ESA has led to litigation for other conservation programs like Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), but the validity of the CCAA policy and individual CCAA agreements have not yet been subjected to formal legal challenge. I briefly summarize the basic premise of the CCAA program, the different organizational frameworks to structure these agreements, and some of the institutional and social challenges to effective implementation, highlighting the example of the CCAA for fluvial Arctic grayling in the upper Big Hole River, Montana.