

News Release

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Approves Plan from NIPSCO and IAWC to Conserve Endangered Karner Blue Butterfly

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced approval of a Habitat Conservation Plan developed jointly and submitted by Northern Indiana Public Service Company and Indiana American Water Company that will give long-term habitat protection to the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly, a colorful, rare species that lives in parts of northern Indiana, as well as several other states.

The Habitat Conservation Plan protects and conserves 86 acres of high-quality butterfly habitat located on company rights-of-way in Lake and Porter counties. The HCP also includes measures that would offset impacts to the species and its habitat resulting from maintenance and other activities carried out by the utilities on the rights-of-way.

“Our success in recovering endangered species like the Karner blue butterfly depends on the willingness of private-sector organizations to step up and actively participate in recovery efforts,” said Service Regional Director Robyn Thorson. “We applaud NIPSCO and Indiana American Water Company for a plan that anticipates the future needs of the Karner blue as well as the needs of the citizens of northern Indiana. It’s an excellent example of how endangered species recovery can work: it does not have to be a choice between the needs of wildlife and the needs of people.”

NIPSCO owns and maintains a number of electric transmission lines and natural gas pipeline rights-of-way throughout northern Indiana, including lands where endangered Karner blue butterflies occur. IAWC owns a corridor for an underground water pipeline in an area where the butterflies live. These areas support wild lupine, a flowering plant that is the sole food source for Karner blue larvae.

The plan spells out measures the companies would take to conduct maintenance of their lands and facilities to minimize impact to the Karner blue butterfly. These measures include vegetation management practices – such as mowing or hand-cutting – that result in conditions favored by wild lupine; maintaining a minimum acreage of wild lupine; planting additional wild lupine, as well as other nectar plants used by adult butterflies; permanent conservation and management of more than 12 acres of land to encourage use by Karner blue butterflies; and monitoring of the butterfly and lupine to ensure management actions are effective.

“Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and IAWC to preserve the Karner blue butterfly and implementing measures to protect its habitat is the right thing to do,” said NIPSCO President Mark Maassel. “NIPSCO, as well as the men and women who are focused on delivering a safe and reliable supply of energy, are committed to being responsible stewards of the environment and sustaining the communities in which we live and serve.”

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Likewise, Indiana American is pleased to participate in this joint project. “The Karner Blue Butterfly project is one of many of our preservation projects currently underway in the Midwest,” said Cindy Hebinstreit, Director of Environmental Management for American Water’s Central Region. “Anytime we can partner with other businesses and agencies such as NIPSCO and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it helps project our commitment to our environment,” she added.

Because the plan meets recovery goals of the Karner blue butterfly, the companies will be issued an “incidental take” permit, which allows a limited number of butterflies to be affected by maintenance activities, as long as the companies continue to implement conservation actions contained in the habitat conservation plan. This provision under the Endangered Species Act is meant to allow activities on private land that might adversely impact endangered or threatened animals, as long as long-term conservation for those species is guaranteed. The Act prohibits harming and killing species listed as endangered or threatened unless a permit is issued.

The Karner blue butterfly is found mainly in Wisconsin but also in portions of Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, New Hampshire and Ohio. It may also occur in Illinois. In 1992, Karner blue butterflies were listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Threats to the Karner blue butterfly include loss of habitat, and lack of natural processes – such as wildfire – that once helped maintain habitat suitable for lupine. Because of their color and appearance, they are also vulnerable to collection.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations.

NIPSCO, with headquarters in Merrillville, Ind., is one of the 10 energy distribution companies of NiSource Inc. (NYSE: NI). With nearly 712,000 natural gas customers and 445,000 electric customers across the northern third of Indiana, NIPSCO is the largest natural gas distribution company, and the second largest electric distribution company, in the state. NiSource distribution companies serve 3.7 million natural gas and electric customers primarily in nine states. More information about NIPSCO is available at www.nipSCO.nisource.com.

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