

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
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Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of the Wyoming Pocket Gopher

The Wyoming pocket gopher may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today, following an initial review of a petition seeking to protect the Wyoming pocket gopher under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Distribution of the Wyoming pocket gopher is believed to be restricted to Sweetwater and Carbon Counties in Wyoming with a possible occurrence in very northern Colorado.

The Service will undertake a more thorough review of the Wyoming pocket gopher to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the Wyoming pocket gopher provided in the petition requesting listing the species under the ESA. The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the Wyoming pocket gopher federal protection under the ESA. Rather, this finding is the first step in a long process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

To ensure this review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the Wyoming pocket gopher and its habitat.

The Service is seeking information regarding the species historical and current status and distribution; its population size and trends; its biology and ecology; its taxonomy (especially genetics of the species); ongoing conservation measures for the species and its habitat; and threats to the long-term persistence of the species.

If it is determined that listing the Wyoming pocket gopher is warranted, the Service intends to also propose critical habitat. Therefore, the Service also requests data and information on what may constitute the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species, where these features are currently found, and whether any of these features may require special management considerations or protection.

Comments and information will be accepted until April 13, 2009 and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2008-0127; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will evaluate all information regarding the status and distribution of the Wyoming pocket gopher, including the impacts or potential impacts to the species resulting from either human activities or natural causes.

In August 2007, the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance and Center for Native Ecosystems submitted a petition requesting the Service list the Wyoming pocket gopher within its known historic range and designate critical habitat.

The petitioners assert the alteration of the species' habitat due to oil and gas development as the primary threat to the species. Although information about the species and its habitat is limited, the Service believes the petition presents substantial information indicating that listing may be warranted due to oil and gas exploration and development. Oil and gas developments could fragment the habitat, directly impact soil and vegetation in the footprint of development sites, and cause other negative impacts that are not fully understood at this time. The Service will assess these factors during the status review to determine the potential effects from energy development on the Wyoming pocket gopher.

For more information regarding the Wyoming pocket gopher, please visit our web site at [http:// www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/WYpocketgopher/WYPocketGopher.html](http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/WYpocketgopher/WYPocketGopher.html)

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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