

Questions and Answers

Removing Endangered Species Act protection for the West Virginia northern flying squirrel

Q. When was the West Virginia northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*) provided Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection?

A. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) first placed the West Virginia northern flying squirrel on the endangered species list as an endangered species on July 1, 1985. The species was jointly listed with the Carolina northern flying squirrel.

Q. Why was the squirrel listed?

A. The threats identified in the final listing rule included: species rarity; habitat loss; human disturbance; and competition with, and transfer of, a lethal parasite from the more common southern flying squirrel.

Q. When was the recovery plan completed for the West Virginia northern flying squirrel?

A. In 1990, the Service finalized one recovery plan covering both the West Virginia northern flying squirrel and the Carolina northern flying squirrel. In 2001, the Service updated the plan to add Appendix A, but did not change the recovery criteria. Appendix A is specific to the West Virginia northern flying squirrel and guides implementation of habitat identification and management on the Monongahela National Forest and other federal lands.

Q. Where does the West Virginia northern flying squirrel occur?

A. The current range of the West Virginia northern flying squirrel follows the spine of the high Allegheny Plateau in a northeast to southwest alignment. Helmick Run in Grant County, West Virginia, marks the northeast periphery and Briery Knob in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, the southwest periphery. The species occurs throughout seven counties of West Virginia and Highland County, Virginia.

Q. What type of habitat does the West Virginia northern flying squirrel prefer?

A. Optimal habitat for the West Virginia northern flying squirrel includes forests containing old growth red spruce and northern hardwoods. However, squirrels will utilize forested habitat dominated by hardwoods that are adjacent to red spruce.

Q. Why is the Service delisting the West Virginia northern flying squirrel?

A. Any threats to the West Virginia northern flying squirrel have either been eliminated or largely abated. Recovery actions have resulted in new information that shows (1) a significant increase in the distribution and number of known West Virginia northern flying squirrel captures; (2) verification of multiple generation reproduction throughout the range; (3) the proven resiliency of the species; (4) suitable habitat has vastly improved and continues to expand; and (5) the lack of threats to the species as a whole. Based on this information, we have determined that the species no longer meets the definition of endangered or threatened.

Q. Will the Service continue to monitor the West Virginia northern flying squirrel?

A. Yes. As required under the Endangered Species Act, the Service has developed a post-delisting monitoring plan that will ensure the status of the squirrel is monitored for at least 10 years after delisting. Should the status of the species begin to decline, the species could be repropose for protection under the Act.