



## Questions and Answers: Headwater and Roundtail Chubs 12-month Finding

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<http://arizonaes.fws.gov>

**Q: What are roundtail and headwater chubs and where are they found?**

**A:** The headwater chub (*Gila nigra*) grows to 8 inches, is dark gray to brown with silvery sides and lives in the upper and middle reaches of moderately sized streams. Headwater chub occurred in a number of tributaries of the Verde River, most of the Tonto Creek drainage, much of the San Carlos River drainage, and parts of the upper Gila River in New Mexico. Today, they occur in the same areas, but have a smaller distribution.

The 9- to 14-inch roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*) is an olive-gray to silver minnow with a lighter belly. The species was historically considered common in deep pools and eddies of large streams throughout its range in the upper and lower Colorado River basins in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. The petition singles out the lower basin – Arizona and New Mexico – population for protection. This population today occupies about 18 percent of its historical range and is limited to Arizona’s Little Colorado, Bill Williams, Salt, San Carlos, and Verde river drainages and Aravaipa Creek, and New Mexico’s upper Gila River.

**Q: What is a 12-month finding?**

**A:** Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), citizens or groups can petition the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service to consider adding a species to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Species. The ESA requires that, for any petition to revise the List of Threatened and Endangered Species that contains substantial scientific and commercial information that listing may be warranted, the Services must make a finding within 12 months of the date of receipt of the petition on whether the petitioned action is (a) not warranted, (b) warranted, or (c) warranted but that the immediate proposal of a regulation implementing the petitioned action is precluded by other pending proposals to determine whether any species is threatened or endangered.

**Q: What is the Service’s 12-month finding for the roundtail and headwater chubs?**

**A:** The Service has published a 12-month petition finding that listing the headwater chub is warranted but precluded. This species will be added to the candidate species list and the Service will develop a proposed rule to list it pursuant to its Listing Priority System. The lower Colorado River basin distinct population segment of the roundtail chub is not discernible from the upper basin population and therefore does not warrant protection under the Services’ Distinct Population Segment Policy.

**Q: What does the “warranted but precluded” finding mean for the headwater chub?**

**A:** The ESA instructs the Service to make expeditious progress to add or remove qualified species from the List of Endangered and Threatened Species. However, there is currently a backlog of qualified species. To address this backlog, the Service has implemented a Listing Priority System that guides its selection of species most urgently needing ESA protection and an order in which the Service should propose those species for ESA protection. The headwater chub will be added to the candidate species list and its status will be monitored annually until the agency's Listing Priority System triggers the listing proposal process. The Service will focus efforts and funding to list other species experiencing even greater threats before evaluating the appropriate level and type of protection and undertaking the extensive and public listing proposal process for the headwater chub.

**Q: How many other candidate species are there in AZ/NM?**

**A:** There are nine animals and three plants in Arizona that are candidates for listing including the Western U.S. DPS of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo ([\*Coccyzus americanus\*](#)), relict leopard frog ([\*Rana onca\*](#)), Gunnison Sage Grouse ([\*Centrocercus minimus\*](#)), Stephan's riffle beetle ([\*Heterelmis stephani\*](#)), Huachuca springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis thompsoni\*](#)), Page springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis morrisoni\*](#)), Three Forks springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis trivialis\*](#)), Zuni bluehead sucker ([\*Catostomus discobolus yarrowi\*](#)), Sonoyta mud turtle ([\*Kinosternon sonoriense longifemorale\*](#)), Acuna cactus ([\*Echinomastus erectocentrus var. acunensis\*](#)), Fickeisen plains cactus ([\*Pediocactus peeblesianus fickeiseniae\*](#)) and lemmon fleabane ([\*Erigeron lemmonii\*](#)).

In New Mexico there are 10 animals on the candidates list including Pacific sheath-tailed bat ([\*Emballonura semicaudata rotensis\*](#)), Western U.S. DPS of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo ([\*Coccyzus americanus\*](#)), Gunnison sage grouse ([\*Centrocercus minimus\*](#)), Texas hornshell ([\*Popenaias popei\*](#)), sand dune lizard ([\*Sceloporus arenicolus\*](#)), Lesser Prairie-chicken, ([\*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus\*](#)), Chupadera springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis chupaderae\*](#)), Gila springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis gilae\*](#)), New Mexico springsnail ([\*Pyrgulopsis thermalis\*](#)) and the Zuni bluehead sucker ([\*Catostomus discobolus yarrowi\*](#)).

**Q: Only a portion of the roundtail chub was petitioned for listing; under what authority is this permitted and how is it being evaluated?**

**A:** In the petition to list these species, the petitioners asked the Service to consider designating a Distinct Vertebrate Population Segment (DPS) for the roundtail chub in the lower Colorado River basin. Under the ESA, the Service must consider listing any species, subspecies, or, for vertebrates, DPSs of these taxa, if warranted. To implement the measures prescribed by the ESA and its Congressional guidance, the Services developed a DPS policy to clarify interpretation of the phrase "distinct population segment of any species of vertebrate fish or wildlife" for the purposes of listing, delisting, and reclassifying species under the ESA. Under the DPS policy, three elements are considered in a decision regarding the status of a possible DPS as endangered or threatened. The elements are: (1) the population segment's discreteness from the remainder of the taxon to which it belongs; (2) the population segment's significance to the taxon to which it belongs; and (3) the population segment's conservation status in relation to the Act's standards for listing (i.e., when treated as if it were a species, is the population segment endangered or threatened?).

The lower Colorado River populations of the roundtail chub were evaluated to determine whether they meet the definition of a DPS, addressing discreteness and significance as required by the DPS policy and was determined to not be discernible from the upper basin population and therefore does not warrant protection under the Services' Distinct Population Segment Policy.

**Q: What has prompted the Fish and Wildlife Service to make this finding at this time?**

**A:** The Center for Biological Diversity (Center) petitioned the Service to list a distinct population segment (DPS) of the roundtail chub in the Lower Colorado River Basin, and to list the headwater chub throughout its range, as threatened or endangered with critical habitat, on April 2, 2003. The Service entered into a settlement agreement with the Center on March 23, 2005, in which it agreed to make a 90-day finding on or by June 30, 2005, and, if positive, a 12-month finding on or by April 6, 2006. A positive 90-day finding on the petition was published on July 12, 2005.

**Q: What threatens roundtail and headwater chubs?**

**A:** Both chub species experience threats primarily from predation and competition with nonnative fishes, and also habitat destruction due to dewatering, impoundment, channelization, and channel changes caused by alteration of riparian vegetation and watershed degradation from mining, livestock overgrazing, roads, water pollution, urban and suburban development, and groundwater pumping.

**Q: Are there efforts to conserve these two species?**

**A:** The State of New Mexico lists the roundtail chub as endangered under its Wildlife Conservation Act. Unlike the Federal Act, however, habitat destruction does not constitute take under New Mexico's law. The Utah Department of Natural Resources has drafted a document entitled "Range-wide Conservation Agreement and Strategy for Roundtail Chub (*Gila robusta*), Bluehead Sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*), and Flannelmouth Sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*)." The document was finalized and signed by all the Colorado River basin states in 2004. The Agreement and Strategy relies upon individual State plans to conserve the species.

Recently, New Mexico has undertaken development of a recovery plan for the roundtail chub, as well as an investigation into listing the headwater chub. Both of these efforts are part of New Mexico's fulfillment of their obligation under the State of Utah-led conservation effort described above. Also, the Arizona Game and Fish Department has created a draft conservation agreement and strategy for roundtail and headwater chub. These efforts are not yet complete, and their efficacy remains to be seen. The Service evaluates such efforts under its Policy for Evaluation of Conservation Efforts when Making Listing Decisions. The Service is working with both states to ensure that these efforts will be as effective as possible.