



News Release

Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona>

For Release: July 29, 2008

Contacts: Jim Rorabaugh (520) 670-6150 ext. 230 or Marit Alanen (520) 670-6150 ext 234

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FINDS PROTECTION FOR TUCSON SHOVEL-NOSED SNAKE MAY BE WARRANTED

The Tucson shovel-nosed snake may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made the announcement following their initial review of a petition seeking to protect the snake under the Endangered Species Act.

The Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the Service on Dec. 15, 2004, to list the Tucson shovel-nosed snake as threatened or endangered throughout its range and designate critical habitat within its range in the United States. The petition cited urban development, agricultural practices, collecting and inadequate regulatory mechanisms as potential threats to the species. The Service's review found the petition provided the substantial information required to trigger a further status review to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants. The finding was published in the *Federal Register*.

To ensure this status review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state, federal and Tribal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the Tucson shovel-nosed snake and its habitat.

Based on the status review, the Service will make one of three possible determinations:

- 1) Protection under the ESA is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken.
- 2) Protection under the ESA as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the Service will publish a proposal to list, solicit independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seek input from the public, and consider the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In general, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed and the final decision.
- 3) Protection under the ESA is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the Federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk. A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

“The petition documented the loss of historical Tucson shovel-nosed snake habitat in Pima County, and presented adequate data documenting threats to the subspecies throughout its current range in Pinal and Maricopa counties,” said Steve Spangle, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office Supervisor.

The Tucson shovel-nosed snake is one of four shovel-nosed subspecies. They are small snakes (10-17 inches in length) with a shovel-shaped snout and coloring that mimics coral snakes. Shovel-nosed snakes are primarily nocturnal and move by “sand swimming” – a sideways swaying motion while either on or under sand or loose soil. Feeding primarily on scorpions, beetle larvae, spiders, and centipedes, they occur in soft, sandy floodplains in creosote-mesquite dominated desert areas of Pima, Pinal and Maricopa counties in south-central Arizona.

Information regarding the subspecies’ range, status, distribution, biology, ecology, habitat needs, genetics and threats is sought. Information should be submitted by September 29, 2008:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Reference Docket # FWS-R2-ES-2008-0060, Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

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.

- <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona> -