



Frequently Asked Questions About Re-Proposal of Critical Habitat for the Endangered Arroyo Toad

Q. What is the arroyo toad?

The arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*) is a small, light greenish-grey or buff-colored toad with dark-spotted, warty skin. Arroyo toads were historically found in streams and river basins in California from Monterey County to San Diego County, and south to Baja California, Mexico. Within the United States, populations of the arroyo toad are currently found in river basins in Monterey, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. On December 16, 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) listed the species as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Q. How did the Service approach the revision of critical habitat?

The Service based its proposed revision on the 2004 proposed critical habitat designation rather than the 2005 final rule because questions were raised about the integrity of the scientific information used in the 2005 final rule. The 2005 toad critical habitat rule was identified by the Service as one of the federal actions that should be reevaluated because of the influence on the rule by a former deputy assistant secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Q. What is the difference between acreage in the 2004 proposed rule and the revised proposal?

The Service is proposing a reduction in critical habitat from 138,713 acres in 2004, to 109,114 acres in the current proposal. In this new proposal, the Service has mapped more precisely critical habitat areas essential for the conservation of the toad. It also reflects new information on the distribution of toads since the 2004 critical habitat proposal.

Q. How is this critical habitat proposal different from the 2004 proposal?

In the new re-proposal, the Service has not excluded private lands that are covered by habitat conservation plans, though they will be considered for exclusion in the final critical habitat. The plans to be considered for exclusion are: Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP), City of San Diego MSHCP, Coachella Valley MSHCP, Southern Orange HCP, and Orange County Central-Coastal HCP. The Service has also not excluded tribal lands but they will also be

considered for exclusion in the final designation of critical habitat. The tribes are: Rincon Band of Luiseño Mission Indians; Pala Band of Luiseño Mission Indians; Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation; the Barona Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians and the Viejas (Baron Long) Group of Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians, which jointly manage the Capitan Grande Band of Diegueno Mission Indians Reservation (Capitan Grande Reservation); and Mesa Grande Band of Diegueno Mission Indians.

Q. Are military lands exempted from the current proposal?

Yes. The Service has exempted 13,010 acres at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and 223 acres at Fallbrook Naval Weapons Station, both in San Diego County, and 6,453 acres at Fort Hunger Liggett Military Reservation in Monterey County because these installations have management plans in place for the arroyo toad.

Q. What habitats does the arroyo toad need?

Arroyo toads prefer shallow pools and open, sandy stream terraces with cottonwoods, oaks, or willows. They breed in streams that have enough water from late March to mid-June to support the tadpoles until they change into toads. Females lay eggs in shallow, slow-moving portions of streams that have little or no vegetation. Juveniles and adults forage for insects on sand and gravel bars with little or no grass or other low-growing cover. Subadult and adult arroyo toads excavate shallow burrows on sand bars, stream-side terraces, or in the uplands where they shelter during the heat of the day or for longer intervals during the dry season.

Because arroyo toad habitats are favored sites for water storage reservoirs, flood control structures, roads, agriculture, urban development, and recreational facilities such as campgrounds and off-highway vehicle parks, many arroyo toad populations were reduced in size or eliminated due to extensive habitat loss that occurred from 1920 into the 1990s. Arroyo toads have disappeared from about 75 percent of their previously occupied habitat in California; dam construction alone has been responsible for the loss of 40 percent. The species also faces threats from mining, grazing, recreational activities, and water management practices. Other factors in the arroyo toad's decline include the introduction of non-native animals such as bullfrogs, bass, and sunfish. These introduced species prey on tadpoles and adults and may significantly reduce the species' ability to maintain healthy populations. Non-native plants, such as arundo and tamarisk, grow so densely that arroyo toads cannot use the terraces for foraging. These plants also shade the pools, making them unsuitable for breeding.

The 109,114 acres of proposed critical habitat contain a mosaic of habitats that provide breeding, foraging, sheltering, and living spaces for arroyo toads, as well as migration and dispersal corridors. The arroyo toad's primary biological needs include breeding, development and growth of eggs and tadpoles, growth and maturation of juveniles and subadults, foraging, sheltering, dispersal, and genetic exchange.

Q. What is critical habitat?

The ESA defines critical habitat as the geographic areas that contain the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special

management consideration. Critical habitat is determined using the best available scientific information about the physical and biological needs of the species. These needs include: space for individual and population growth, and for normal behavior; food, water, light, air and minerals; cover or shelter; habitat that is protected from disturbance or is representative of the historical geographic and ecological distribution of a species; and, for animals, sites for breeding, reproduction, and rearing of offspring.

Q. What protection does the arroyo toad currently receive as a listed species?

The ESA forbids the import, export, or interstate or foreign sale of protected animals and plants without a special permit. It also prohibits the "take" of listed species. "Take" means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.

Federal agencies must consult with the Service to insure that projects they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

Permits may be issued by the Service for activities that are otherwise prohibited under the ESA, if these activities are for scientific purposes or to enhance the propagation or survival of the affected species, or for "take" that is incidental to otherwise lawful activities.

More questions?

Call or write:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, CA 93003
(805) 644-1766