

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

*Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region
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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Finds Cerulean Warbler Not Warranted for Endangered Species Act Listing

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that while populations of the cerulean warbler are declining, listing the species as threatened under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted. The Service will pursue cooperative conservation initiatives designed to reverse population declines and prevent the need to list this migratory songbird.

Today's finding is the result of a review of the warbler's status, which included a comprehensive review of scientific information, as well as information gathered from the public and species experts. The Service evaluated information on the warbler's current population, projected trends in population levels, and threats to the warbler both in the United States and on the bird's wintering grounds in South America.

"We have done an exhaustive review of information, and have consulted national and international experts on this species," said Robyn Thorson, Midwest Regional Director for the Service. "Based on that input, the species is unlikely to be in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future."

A number of conservation groups, headed by the Southern Environmental Law Center and the National Audubon Society, petitioned the Service in 2000 to list the cerulean warbler as a threatened species, citing concerns over loss and fragmentation of habitat. The Service issued a preliminary finding in 2002 that the petition had merit and launched a status review of the species.

Although there is no precise estimate of the current abundance of the cerulean warbler, the Service used a 1995 population estimate of 560,000 warblers during its review of the species' status. Based on 40 years of data obtained through the Breeding Bird Survey which indicates the population is declining at about 3 percent each year, the estimated population in 2006 would be

approximately 400,000. At this rate of decline, the Service estimates the cerulean warbler population would number in the tens of thousands 100 years from now.

“This isn’t the end of our involvement,” Thorson said. “Our intent is to move forward with conservation efforts so that decades from now, we’re not once again faced with a listing decision. Even though the cerulean warbler does not meet the criteria for listing as an endangered or threatened species, it is still a bird that needs our attention and help.”

Thorson said the Service is already working on efforts to conserve the cerulean warbler and will pursue new initiatives to help the bird. They include continued, long-term monitoring; assistance to the Cerulean Warbler Technical Group; development of partnerships in support of Service programs such as Migratory Bird’s Cerulean Warbler Focal Species Strategy; and increased support of international conservation efforts, particularly in South America.

The cerulean warbler is a small woodland songbird that nests across eastern North America from the eastern Great Plains north to Minnesota, Ontario and Quebec, east to Massachusetts, and south to Louisiana. The core area of the warbler’s breeding range is the Appalachian Mountain region of eastern Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, southern and western West Virginia, southeastern Ohio, and southwestern Pennsylvania. Cerulean warblers have specific breeding habitat needs consisting of mature deciduous forests with complex vertical vegetation structure. They winter in a narrow elevation band in the Andes Mountains of northern South America.

Threats to the species are thought to include loss and fragmentation of the forests used by warblers during nesting season and loss of habitat in the species’ winter habitat in South America. This species undertakes a relatively long migration compared with many other songbirds, covering a distance of about 2,500 miles between the central latitudes of North America and northern latitudes of South America (which includes migrating across the Gulf of Mexico). Loss of suitable habitat at migratory stopover sites may also be a problem, but little is known about the migratory route used by the species.

Information about the Service’s finding on the petition to list the cerulean warbler can be found at http://www.fws.gov/midwest/eco_serv/soc/index.html

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.