



News Release

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) www.fws.gov/southwest/

For Release: May 23, 2011

Contacts: Alisa Shull, (512) 490-0057
Lesli Gray, (972) 569-8588

THE SPOT-TAILED EARLESS LIZARD MAY WARRANT PROTECTION UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The spot-tailed earless lizard (*Holbrookia lacerata*) may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today, following an initial review of a petition seeking to protect the spot-tailed earless lizard under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Service finds that the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing the spot-tailed earless lizard may be warranted. This finding is based on potential threats posed by predation from fire ants. Fire ants are known to adversely impact native fauna in general, including reptiles. Fire ants occur across a large part of the spot-tailed earless lizard's range and may pose a threat through direct predation on adults, hatchlings and eggs.

The spot-tailed earless lizard is divided into two distinct subspecies, based on morphological (physical) differences and geographic separation. The northern spot-tailed earless lizard subspecies (*Holbrookia lacerata lacerata*) historically occurred throughout the Edwards Plateau in Texas. The southern spot-tailed earless lizard (*Holbrookia lacerata subcaudalis*) historically occurred through south Texas into parts of Mexico's States of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. The present population of the spot-tailed earless lizard's population status is largely unknown.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the species provided in the petition requesting listing of the species under the Act. The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the spot-tailed earless lizard federal protection under the ESA. Rather, this finding is the first step in a long process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

The Service will undertake a more thorough status review of the species to determine whether to propose adding the species to the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife. With publication of this notice in the *Federal Register* the Service will open a 60-day public comment period.

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

- 1) Listing is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken.

- 2) Listing 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) Listing 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.

To ensure this status review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the spot-tailed earless lizard and its habitat.

For more information on this finding, what to comment on, or how to submit comments, see the *Federal Register* notice on our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest>. We will accept comments received or postmarked on or before July 22, 2011.

For further information contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758; by telephone (512) 490-0057; or by facsimile (512) 490-0974. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest>