



News Release

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FEDERAL HABITAT PROTECTION DESIGNATED FOR ENDANGERED ZUNI BLUEHEAD SUCKER

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated 35 stream miles in northwestern New Mexico as critical habitat for the endangered Zuni bluehead sucker. In 2013, the Service originally proposed to designate 297 miles as critical habitat. However, refined genetic information on the subspecies, ground-truthing of current habitat and hydrologic conditions, and the assessment of tribal habitat management have resulted in a reduced final designation. The final rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on June 7 and will become effective July 7.

The Zuni bluehead sucker is a 3 to 14-inch fish that occupies moderate to fast-flowing headwater streams. Young fish prefer quiet, shallow areas near the shore line. Their coloration varies from dark green to dirty white, depending on habitat conditions, but their head is a bluish cast and mature males will sport a bright red stripe at spawning season. The subspecies was added to list of endangered species in 2013.

In total, approximately 34.6 stream miles in McKinley and Cibola Counties, New Mexico have been designated as critical habitat – 1.3 stream miles on State land, 12.1 miles of Forest Service streams and 21.1 miles on private land. No critical habitat was designated in Arizona, largely as a result of tribal management and genetic clarification.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act (Act) requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of designating it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless doing so would jeopardize the existence of a threatened or endangered species. The Service worked closely with the Zuni Tribe and the Navajo Nation to develop fisheries management plans for their lands and subsequently excluded lands of both tribes from the final designation.

New information resulted in the removal of a portion of the proposed Zuni River Unit. Based upon further investigation, a section of Cebolla Creek (from Pescado Reservoir upstream on Cebolla Creek to Ramah Reservoir) is a dry wash with no running water or stream channel present except during periods of rain; this reach is unlikely to have perennial or intermittent flows. As a result, 4.9 miles were removed because this section of Cebolla Creek is not essential to the conservation of the species and does not meet the definition of critical habitat.

Under the Act, critical habitat identifies geographic areas occupied at the time a species is listed that contain the physical or biological features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species. Areas outside the geographic area occupied by the species at the time of listing that are essential for the conservation of the species can be designated. The Act defines “conservation” as the actions leading towards the eventual recovery of a species to the point where it is no longer threatened or endangered.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. The critical habitat designation identifies areas that are important to the conservation of the Zuni bluehead sucker. The critical habitat designation will require federal agencies to consult with the Service on any of their actions that may affect designated critical habitat. The Service can then recommend ways to minimize any adverse effects. It imposes no requirements on state or private actions on state or private lands where no federal funding, permits or approvals are required.

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/angered/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit www.fws.gov, or connect with us through any of these social media channels:



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