



# News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes/>

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## CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR TWO DECLINING SOUTHWEST FISHES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a proposed rule to re-designate critical habitat for the federally threatened spikedace and loach minnow. Both fishes have been protected as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) since 1986.

The Service proposes to designate 633 miles of rivers and streams and their flood plains in New Mexico and Arizona as critical habitat for the two species. This includes 376 miles for the spikedace and 474 miles for the loach minnow in portions of the Gila, San Francisco, Blue, Black, Verde, Lower San Pedro rivers and some tributaries in Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Pinal, and Yavapai counties in Arizona, and Catron, Grant, and Hidalgo counties in New Mexico. Some of the mileage overlaps.

The proposed critical habitat includes river and streams reaches plus a 300-foot buffer extending from each bank. In New Mexico, 168 federal stream-miles, one state stream-mile, and 90 private stream-miles have been proposed. In Arizona, 199 federal streams-miles, 8 state stream-miles, 134 private stream-miles and 33 tribal stream-miles are being considered. (Note: Table 2 in the Federal Register mistakenly transposes "Arizona" and "New Mexico" mileages.)

"We are asking land owners, recreationists, biologists, business owners and agencies to review the proposal and help us refine it," said Steve Spangle, Arizona Field Supervisor for the Service. "Comments regarding the threats to these streams, existing protections for them, and information concerning current or anticipated economics of fish and habitat conservation in these areas are especially helpful to us."

Comments on the proposed rule should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Arizona 85021-4951 or by facsimile to 602/242-2513. Electronic comments can be submitted to: [SD\\_LMComments@fws.gov](mailto:SD_LMComments@fws.gov). Deadline for comments is February 21, 2006 and the deadline for requesting a public hearing on the proposal is February 3.

Critical habitat has twice been designated for the fishes but set aside by Federal courts. Availability of a draft NEPA document and economic analysis will be announced at a later date.

Both fish are less than three inches long. The spikedace is silver-sided and the loach minnow is olive-colored (males are brilliantly colored during spawning) with upward-directed eyes. Both the spikedace and loach minnow require perennial streams, where they inhabit shallow riffles

with sand, gravel, and rubble substrates free of fine sedimentation; moderate to swift currents; and swift pools over sand or gravel substrates.

The spikedace and loach minnow have been eliminated from 85-90 percent of their formerly occupied habitat due to the introduction and spread of nonnative aquatic species that prey on and compete with them, and habitat loss and degradation from a variety of actions.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features that contribute to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands or limit public access to public or private lands and waters. Federal agencies are required to consult with the Service for any activities they undertake, fund or permit that affect designated critical habitat.

By definition, critical habitat also does not include developed areas that do not provide elements that contribute to the conservation of the survival of the species, even though these areas may lie within designated critical habitat boundaries. For example, paved roads, dikes, levees, diversion structures, railroad tracks, railroad trestles, water diversion canals outside of natural stream channels, cultivated agricultural land, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments would not be considered critical habitat.

The Endangered Species Act requires the Service to designate critical habitat on the basis of the best scientific data available, after taking into consideration the economic impact, and any other relevant impact, of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. The Service may exclude areas from critical habitat designation when the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of including the areas within critical habitat, provided the exclusion will not result in extinction of the species.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the Service, and state wildlife management areas.

The proposal and supporting information are available on the Internet at [www.fws.gov/arizonaes](http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes) or by contacting the Field Supervisor at the address below.

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, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management 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 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.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Photos of the spinedace and loach minnow and other supporting information are available at <http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes/Fish.htm> or by contacting Jeff Humphrey at (602) 242-0210.