



News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Office

www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR TWO SOUTHWESTERN MINNOWS -Reclassification from Threatened to Endangered Status also Proposed-

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a proposed rule to designate approximately 796 miles of streams and rivers in central and eastern Arizona and western New Mexico as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the federally threatened spikedace and loach minnow. Additionally proposed is a reclassification of both species, from threatened to endangered, recognizing that they are in danger of extinction.

Critical Habitat

Areas proposed as critical habitat for the spikedace and loach minnow are essential to the conservation of the species and include streams and rivers typically less than three feet deep with perennial flows. Eight critical habitat units are proposed in Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, and Yavapai counties in Arizona and Catron, Grant, and Hidalgo counties in New Mexico. The proposed units occur on portions of the Verde, Salt, San Pedro, Gila, San Francisco and Blue rivers and their tributaries and Bonita and Eagle creeks. Over 61 percent of the proposed critical habitat occurs on federal lands, with the remaining areas under state (2%), tribal (7%) and private (30%) land ownership.

“Continuing to conserve stream habitat, including reducing competitive and predatory nonnative fishes in certain waters, is essential to reversing the decline of these Arizona natives,” said Steve Spangle, the Service’s Arizona field supervisor. “Critical habitat designation doesn’t establish preserves or change land ownership, but it does muster greater federal assistance and identifies locations essential to spikedace and loach minnow conservation.”

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Areas identified as essential to the conservation of the spikedace and loach minnow can be excluded from the final critical habitat designation if they are protected by approved Habitat Conservation Plans or other management plans or for economic reasons if the exclusions would not result in the extinction of the species.

The Service is preparing a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat that will be released for public review and comment at a later date.

Critical habitat for the spikedace and loach minnow was previously designated in 1994, 2000 and 2007. As a result of two May 2009 challenges to the 2007 critical habitat designation, as well as the Inspector General's audit and Solicitor's advice, the Service is re-proposing critical habitat for these two fish species. The Court granted our motion for voluntary remand and left the 2007 designation in place pending the current re-designation.

The Fishes

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 are fewer than three inches long and require perennial streams, where they inhabit shallow water with moderate to swift currents.

The spikedace and loach minnow are threatened by habitat destruction and introduction of nonnative aquatic species that compete with them. Due to these threats, the spikedace's present range is approximately 10 percent or less of its historical range and the loach minnow occupies 15 to 20 percent of its historical range. Both fishes have been protected as threatened species under the ESA since 1986.

Uplisting

In recent years, some threats have been reduced due to improved federal lands management and reintroduction efforts. However, prolonged drought, anticipated effects of climate change and increasing abundance and the expanding range of competitive and predatory nonnative fishes have increased the threat of extinction for both species. As a result, the Service is proposing to reclassify the spikedace and loach minnow from 'threatened' to 'endangered' status.

An 'endangered' species is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A 'threatened' species is one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

The Service treats endangered animal species similarly to threatened species with regard to prohibitions on take and requirements for consultation by federal agencies. However, the ESA provides management flexibility for threatened species that is not allowed for endangered species. The Service sometimes makes exceptions to the take rule for threatened species (for example, to allow some traditional land-use activities to continue), and is able to issue take permits to allow more activities that affect threatened species than would be permitted for endangered species.

Public Input

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about the spikedace and loach minnow is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>, or by contacting the Service's Arizona Ecological Service Office at (602) 242-0210. Comments on the proposal and relevant scientific and commercial information will be accepted until Dec. 27, 2010, and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2010-0072; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. Written requests for a public hearing will be accepted until Dec. 13, 2010, via the Federal eRulemaking Portal or Division of Policy and Directives Management mailing address.

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. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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Note to editors:

Photo support is available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210) or on the Internet at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Fish.htm>

The proposed critical habitat rule and maps are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey or on the Internet at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>