



News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

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Fish and Wildlife Service to Update Road Map to Recovering Endangered Yuma Clapper Rail

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has drafted a revised recovery plan for the endangered Yuma clapper rail – a marsh bird protected under the Endangered Species Act. When completed, the recovery plan will help guide efforts needed to conserve the species, and identify population and habitat goals to determine when the species has successfully recovered and can be removed from the list of animals protected by the Act. The original Yuma clapper rail recovery plan was developed 26 years ago and is outdated given the species' current status and threats. The Service is soliciting comments on the draft revised plan and new information on the status of the Yuma clapper rail.

The Yuma clapper rail is the only freshwater clapper rail. It uses marshes along the lower Colorado River, lower Gila River basin, lower Virgin River and Salton Sea in the United States, and Cienega de Santa Clara in Mexico. Threats to the species when it was first identified as endangered in 1967 included loss of habitat due to river channelization and changes in flows due to managed water deliveries. New threats include increasing selenium levels in occupied habitats and climate change that may affect water availability to maintain habitat.

The goal of the draft revised plan is to increase the number of Yuma clapper rails to 824 in the United States, secure the habitat needed to support them, and provide habitat connections linking rail populations. (641 Yuma clapper rails were documented in the United States in 2008.) The draft plan proposes that attaining these benchmarks, together with five consecutive years of stable or increasing population trends, would demonstrate that the rail is no longer in danger of extinction and could be “downlisted” from endangered to threatened status under the Act. The rail would be considered recovered and could be removed from the list of animals protected under the Act when an additional five years of stable or improving populations is achieved.

The draft plan calls for an assessment of the threat from existing and predicted selenium levels to rails and, if appropriate, developing a response to address selenium's effects. High selenium levels can be toxic to rails – damaging tissue and impairing reproduction. Levels of selenium in clapper rail habitats in the U.S. and Mexico may have increased over the last 10-15 years due to effects of water use for agriculture and high evaporation rates.

The draft plan also identifies the need to ensure that a water supply to protect the largest Yuma clapper rail population at the Cienega de Santa Clara in Mexico is developed and protected. Although the Yuma clapper rail is not listed in Mexico, that population is a critical component for the overall survival and recovery of the species.

Persons wishing to review the draft revised recovery plan can obtain a paper or electronic copy from the Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951; by phone at (602) 242-0210 extension 236; or from the Internet at www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/. Written comments and materials pertaining to the draft revised recovery plan may be mailed to “Field Supervisor” at the address above or emailed to YCRrecovery@fws.gov. To ensure that comments are considered, they should be received no later than April 12, 2010.

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.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Photographs of the Yuma clapper rail are available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Birds.htm>; additional photos are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (jeff_humphrey@fws.gov, 602/242-0210 x222). Yuma clapper rail vocalizations (song/call) are available at: <http://www.naturesongs.com/ycra2.wav>.