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Miami Blue Butterfly Receives Federal Endangered Species Status

Vero Beach, Florida – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is formally listing the Miami blue butterfly, a small, coastal, non-migratory butterfly, as endangered. This action permanently protects the butterfly under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and follows an emergency listing, enacted on August 10, 2011, which had temporarily protected it for 240 days.

The Miami blue's geographic range once extended from the Dry Tortugas north along the Florida coasts to about St. Petersburg and Daytona, but it is now restricted to a handful of remote islands within the Florida Keys. Only a few, small populations are known to remain.

The listing of the Miami blue butterfly as endangered becomes effective on April 6, 2012, upon publication of the final rule in the *Federal Register*. Under the ESA, an endangered species is any species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

In making this final listing determination, the Service has carefully assessed the best scientific and commercial information available regarding the butterfly's status and past, present, and future threats.

The Miami blue butterfly's habitat and range are threatened by destruction, modification, and curtailment from human population growth, associated development and agriculture, and environmental effects resulting from climate change. Its few populations, small population size, restricted range, and loss of genetic diversity, as well as the potential for an environmental event to be catastrophic, threaten the Miami blue. Collection of the butterfly is also a significant threat, and existing regulations do not provide adequate protection. As a result, impacts from increasing threats are likely to result in extinction.

Under the ESA, it is illegal to kill, harm or otherwise "take" a listed species, or to possess, import, export, or engage in interstate or international commerce of a listed species without authorization in the form of a permit from the Service. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to minimize the impact of their activities on listed species, and directs the Service to work with federal agencies and other partners to develop and carry out recovery efforts for those species. Listing also focuses attention on the needs of the species, encouraging conservation efforts by other agencies (federal, state and local), conservation groups and other organizations and individuals.

With this final rule, the Service also is listing the cassius blue butterfly, ceraunus blue butterfly, and nickerbean blue butterfly as threatened in portions of their natural ranges due to their similarity of appearance to the Miami blue [under a special rule]. These three butterflies overlap in range with the

Miami blue in coastal south and central Florida, but their entire natural ranges include Caribbean countries. The special rule [under section 4(d) of the ESA] prohibits collection of any cassius blue, ceraunus blue, or nickerbean blue butterflies or their immature stages in coastal counties south of Interstate 4, between Tampa and Daytona Beach. Only collection of these similar butterflies within the current and historical range of the Miami blue butterfly is prohibited. Otherwise lawful activities that may impact these similar butterflies, such as legal use of pesticides and mowing, are not prohibited. Extending the prohibitions of collection to the three similar butterflies will help protect the Miami blue from collection, yet reduces unnecessary regulations and restrictions.

The Service continues to work with the State of Florida and many other partners on initiatives to help conserve the Miami blue and its habitat. Priority efforts include: (1) conducting additional surveys to search for other potential populations; (2) assessing the extent of occupancy and size of the remaining population(s); and, (3) understanding and reducing controllable threats. In addition, the Service is drafting a recovery outline for the Miami blue and will develop a recovery plan with assistance from partners and other stakeholders.

The final rule will appear in the *Federal Register* tomorrow and can be viewed online at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. [FWS–R4–ES–2011–0043]. For more information about the Miami blue butterfly and the final rule, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/> or <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/>. Copies are also available by contacting our South Florida Ecological Services Office at 1339 20th Street, Vero Beach, Florida 32960-3559 or via phone at 772/562-3909, ext. 323.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America’s native fish, wildlife, and plants. The Service is 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, visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

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