U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Candidate Species

Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act

What are candidate species?
Candidate species are plants and animals for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but for which development of a proposed listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The current list of FWS candidate species is available at **http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/index.html**. **html**. The National Marine Fisheries Service, which has jurisdiction over most marine species, also maintains a list of "species of concern" for which more information is needed before they can be proposed for listing.

What protection does the ESA provide to candidate species?
Candidate species receive no statutory protection under the ESA. The FWS encourages cooperative conservation efforts for these species because they are, by definition, species that may warrant future protection under the ESA.

How do species become candidates?
Identification of potential candidates is a cooperative effort. The FWS endangered species specialists work closely with staff from other FWS resource programs as well as representatives of other Federal and State natural resource agencies, local and Tribal governments, business and industry, academia, conservation organizations, and other private interests to identify potential candidate species. NatureServe (**http://www.natureserve.org/explorer/**), working in cooperation with State Natural Heritage programs, ranks species status at State, national, and global levels based on their relative imperilment. This is also an important resource for identifying potential candidate species.

When sufficient information is developed to make well documented, biologically sound determinations about a species' status, the FWS Field Offices consider whether it meets the criteria for listing under the ESA. The FWS Regional Offices then provide recommendations for additions to the candidate list to the FWS Director, whose concurrence is necessary before a species becomes an official candidate species. Candidate species are assigned a listing priority from 1 to 12 based on the magnitude of threats they face, the immediacy of the threats, and their taxonomic uniqueness (for example, full species have higher priority than subspecies). The species' listing priority dictates the relative order in which proposed listing rules are prepared, with the species at greatest risk (listing priority 1 through 3) being proposed first.

How does the public know what species are candidates for listing?
The FWS annually publishes a Candidate Notice of Review (CNOR) in the Federal Register that provides an updated list of plants and animals native to the United States that are regarded as candidates for possible listing. While there is no requirement under the ESA to publish such a list, we believe that it is important to advise other Federal agencies, State and Tribal governments, local governments, industry, and the public of those species that are at risk and may warrant ESA protection. Advance notice of potential ESA listings can assist environmental planning efforts allowing resource managers to alleviate threats and thereby possibly remove the need to list these taxa. The current CNOR can be viewed at **http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html**.

What is the advantage of conserving species that are already candidates or proposed for listing?
An effective program for the conservation of endangered species requires a means of addressing species that have not yet been listed but that face immediate, identifiable threats. Early conservation maximizes management options for landowners and for the species, minimizes the cost of recovery, and reduces the potential for restrictive land use policies that may be necessary in the future. Addressing the needs of species before the regulatory requirements associated with listed species come into play often allows greater management flexibility to stabilize or restore these species and their habitats. In addition, as threats are reduced and populations are increased or stabilized, priority for listing can be shifted to those species in greatest need of the ESA's protective measures. Ideally, sufficient threats can be removed to eliminate the need for listing.

David Tibbetts/USFWS

In New Hampshire, efforts are underway to help conserve the New England cottontail, a candidate species.

The FWS offers technical expertise and provides funding for conservation of candidate and other species at-risk. For further information, see **http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/how-you-can-help.html**.

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