

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Draft Recovery Plan for Endangered Yellowcheek Darter Available

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces the availability of the draft recovery plan for the Yellowcheek Darter, a fish federally-listed as endangered.

The Yellowcheek Darter grows up to 2.5 inches total length and is only found in the Devils, Middle, South, and Archey forks of the Little Red River in Arkansas. This small darter is threatened primarily by factors associated with the present destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range. Threats include impoundment, sedimentation, poor livestock grazing practices, improper timber harvest practices, gravel mining, channelization, channel instability, and natural gas development. Primary concerns for the darter are related to curtailment of habitat and range, small population sizes, and their resulting vulnerability to catastrophic events.

“This small darter continues to face threats in the tributaries of the Little Red River.” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “We are working closely with private landowners and communities, state and federal agencies, universities, and conservation institutes, to survey for Yellowcheek Darter populations, protect and restore its habitat, and find unique ways to recover this fish.”

Several efforts are already underway to conserve the Yellowcheek Darter and its habitat. The Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and numerous private landowners have entered into the Upper Little Red River Safe Harbor Agreement, a voluntary agreement involving private or non-federal landowners whose actions will help contribute to the darter’s recovery. In addition, the Service, working closely with the city of Clinton, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Southwestern Energy, and several other private landowners, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, restored three river miles of the Archey and South Forks of the Little Red River that was channelized for flood control in the mid 1980s. Yellowcheek Darters quickly recolonized this reach of river following restoration efforts.

The draft recovery plan for the Yellowcheek Darter describes actions considered necessary for its recovery, establishes criteria for reclassification to threatened and delisting, and estimates the time and cost for implementing needed measures.

The strategy for recovery of the Yellowcheek Darter is to conserve its genetic diversity across its historical range; fully quantify population demographics and status within each of the four forks; improve population size and viability within each fork; reduce threats having the greatest adverse effect on the species within each fork; emphasize voluntary soil and water stewardship practices by citizens living and working within the upper Little Red River watershed; and use captive propagation to prevent local extirpation within forks where recruitment is failing.

Yellowcheek Darter recovery also requires increasing understanding of the darter's population status throughout its range; developing information on life history, ecology, mortality, and habitat requirements; gaining a better understanding of all the threats the darter faces; and using that information to implement management actions to promote recovery. Conservation and recovery of the species will require human intervention for the foreseeable future.

According to the goals described in the recovery plan, the Yellowcheek Darter will be considered for reclassification to threatened status when: (1) water quality and quantity in the Middle, South and either Archey or Devils Forks, as defined by the best available science (to be refined by recovery actions), supports the long-term survival of Yellowcheek Darter in its natural environment; (2) streams where the Yellowcheek Darter occurs contain geomorphically stable channels with relatively silt-free, moderate to strong velocity riffles with gravel cobble and boulder substrates that support adequate macroinvertebrate prey items, as defined by reference stream conditions in the Boston Mountain ecoregion; (3) healthy, self-sustaining (evident by multiple age classes of individuals, including naturally recruited juveniles, and recruitment rates exceeding mortality rates) natural populations of Yellowcheek Darters, as defined by the best available science (to be refined by recovery actions), are maintained in three of four tributaries (Middle, South, and Archey or Devils Forks) at stable or increasing levels for 15 years (based on surveys conducted every three years via standard protocol); (4) a captive propagation, augmentation and reintroduction plan has been established, and a contingency plan is in place to ensure the survival of the species if a catastrophic event affects portions of a wild population.

The Yellowcheek Darter qualifies for delisting when: (1) the measures mentioned above have been realized and demonstrated effective through monitoring efforts; (2) Yellowcheek Darter populations in the Middle, South and either Archey or Devils Forks continue to be self-sustaining, stable or increasing, as defined by the best available science (to be refined by recovery actions), for an additional 15 years beyond reclassification to threatened status; and (3) commitments are in place to maintain conservation measures and recovered status.

To view the draft recovery plan on the web, please visit

<http://www.fws.gov/angered/species/recovery-plans.html>. Paper copies of the plan and its associated documents can be obtained by calling 501-513-4470. A copy of the plan also may be obtained by contacting Melvin Tobin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Ecological Services Field Office, 110 S. Amity Road, Suite 300, Conway, Arkansas 72032. You also may submit written comments and materials to the Service at this address, or you can e-mail comments to Melvin_Tobin@fws.gov or fax them to 501-513-4480. Please include "Yellowcheek Darter Draft Recovery Plan Comments" on the subject line.

More information concerning this endangered fish, including a link to its conservation strategy and status assessment (companion documents to the draft recovery plan), can be found at the Arkansas Field Office website: <http://www.fws.gov/arkansas-es/>

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watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws>, and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.

On the publication date (March 6, 2017), the document will appear here:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/current>

And here:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/getftoc.action>

You can use the FWS FR site to search by key word, RIN, tracking number, species, etc. (I recommend the Quick Search field):

<https://www.fws.gov/policy/frsystem/default.cfm>