



## U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### Frequently Asked Questions: 12-month Finding on Petition to List the Georgia Aster (*Symphyotrichum georgianum*)

#### **Q1: What is a petition?**

**A1:** A petition is a request filed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) , as amended, by an interested party asking that a species be listed on, delisted from, or reclassified (i.e., from threatened to endangered or from endangered to threatened) on the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

#### **Q2: What is a 12-month finding?**

**A2:** Section 4(b) of the ESA requires the Service to make a finding on whether a petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information to indicate that the petitioned action may be warranted; this is referred to as a 90-day finding. If the Service finds the petitioned action may be warranted the ESA requires the Service to initiate a formal review to determine if the action is warranted and, if so, how it intends to proceed. This second determination is referred to as a 12-month finding, and is normally made 12 months following the receipt of the petition.

#### **Q3: Who petitioned the Service and what did they request?**

**A3:** On May 11, 2004, the Service received a petition requesting that it list Georgia aster as endangered under the ESA. The petition was submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity and included supporting information regarding the species' taxonomy and ecology, historical and current distribution, present status, and actual and potential causes of decline.

#### **Q4: Why was there a delay in processing the petition to list the Georgia aster?**

**A4:** At the time we received the petition, Georgia aster was already on the candidate species list. Therefore, we had determined it was warranted for listing but precluded by higher priority listing actions. We reviewed the status of the Georgia aster in every Candidate Notice of Review since the petition was received in 2004.

Under the 2011 Multi-District Litigation (MDL) settlement agreements, the Service agreed to systematically, over a period of six years, review and address the needs of 251 candidate species to determine if they should be added to the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Georgia aster was on that list of candidate species. Therefore, the Service is making this finding at this time in order to comply with the conditions outlined in the MDL agreement. For more information, please see <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/>.

**Q5: What options did the Service have when making the 12-month finding?**

**A5:** The Service considered one of three possible determinations:

1. Listing is not warranted, in which case no further action is taken.
2. Listing as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the Service publishes a proposal to list, solicits independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seeks input from the public, and considers the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In general, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed and the final decision.
3. Listing is warranted, but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk. A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

**Q6: What did the Service conclude?**

**A6:** After a thorough review of best available scientific and commercial information, the Service found that the listing of Georgia aster as threatened or endangered under the ESA is not warranted.

Since 1999, greater than 50 additional populations of Georgia aster have been discovered. There are currently 118 known populations, including 55 on conserved lands, where they are protected from development and actively managed.

On May 16, 2014, several partners signed a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA). CCAs are agreements designed to conserve plants and animals that are candidates for the federal endangered species list. The CCA for the Georgia aster was signed by the Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Forest Service, National Park Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Department of Transportation, Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation, North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services-Plant Conservation Program, Clemson University, and Georgia Power, with each signatory agreeing to actions that conserve the plant and its habitat. Commitments include:

- Searching for new populations.
- Monitoring known occurrences to estimate range-wide population trends.
- Keeping forests with Georgia aster thinned to a level that provides ample sunlight, while minimizing threats from drought and competition.
- Avoiding mowing rights-of-way from late spring to mid-fall, when Georgia aster is at its tallest, and reproducing. If possible, mow in mid- to late-spring to maximize impacts to invasive plants before Georgia aster is high enough to be significantly damaged.
- When mowing rights-of-way, cut to no less than four inches, and avoid operating machinery on wet soils to reduce soil compaction.

- Avoiding broadcast spraying of herbicides in or near Georgia aster populations.
- Marking populations to avoid inadvertent damage during right-of-way maintenance.

**Q7: What did the Service consider in reaching its conclusion and finding?**

**A7:** In making this finding, the Service conducted a thorough status review using the best available scientific and commercial information in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): 50 CFR 424.14(c). This included any new data or information provided by partners.

**Q8: Where can I find more information on the Georgia aster or the listing process?**

**A8:** Visit the Service's web sites at <http://www.fws.gov/asheville/>, <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/>, or call the Service's Asheville, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Office at 828/258-3939.