

Candidate Conservation

Program Overview

The Candidate Conservation Program has two key elements: conducting assessments of declining species and working to conserve them and thus prevent the need to list those species. By partnering with private landowners, tribes, State fish and wildlife agencies and other federal agencies, the Candidate Conservation Program encourages, through voluntary programs, conservation agreements and habitat restoration to benefit at-risk species. The Candidate Conservation Program supports the DOI's Resource Protection strategic goal by providing technical assistance on implementing conservation actions, assessing the status of candidates and other declining species, and cooperating in the development of candidate and state conservation agreements.

Candidate Species Assessment

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the ESA, but for which development of a listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The candidate review process is designed to provide a means for identifying species in need of the ESA's protection. In addition, identification of species in need of listing assists the Service and our partners in prioritizing conservation efforts. Each year, the Service reviews the status of species previously identified as candidates to decide if these species should be removed from the candidate list or if the listing priority should change. The listing priority number is based on the magnitude and immediacy of threats to the species, as well as the taxonomic status. The Service also reviews the status of species-at-risk to determine if these species should be elevated to candidate status. Annually, the Service prepares a Candidate Notice of Review for publication in the Federal Register. The Notice provides an updated list of candidate species and includes a request to the public for additional status information for each species. The Service requests information on species that should be included or removed from future updates of the list of candidates. The Service also describes progress undertaking listing actions and announces resubmitted petition findings in the Federal Register.

The Service uses the best available scientific information to assess species for consideration as candidates for listing. One chief source of information is the network of State Natural Heritage Programs databases, which tracks species already imperiled and those that are declining or at-risk. This additional information, along with Service data and scientific information obtained through various other sources, helps identify species that can benefit from early implementation of conservation actions.

Preventing the Need To List Species: A Collaborative Process

Technical assistance is the key phrase that defines the Candidate Conservation Program. Service biologists deliver expertise to different customers including other federal agencies, State fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and private landowners. Interested partners work with the Service to determine what could be done to conserve a declining species. Service biologists determine the status of the species in question through population assessment techniques and review of the best available scientific information, including information received from our partners. Once species assessment has been conducted, Service biologists recommend various actions to promote species conservation. This can include recommendations at various scales, from recommendations useful to individual landowners interested in implementing conservation measures on their property, to broad scale conservation strategies covering the range of a species.

Recommendations are developed and used collaboratively with States, territories, other federal agencies, tribes, and the private sector and private landowners to implement actions that can prevent or

remove the need to list declining species under the ESA. The Service believes implementing the Candidate Conservation Program helps realize savings in the Listing and Recovery Programs.

The Service has identified 284 plant and animal species as of December 31, 2004, that are candidates for listing. Additionally, 21 species are currently proposed for listing under the ESA and may also benefit from candidate conservation actions. For some of these 21 proposed species, conservation actions taken now can eliminate the need to proceed with a final listing, and for others, conservation actions taken before listing will assist in a speedier recovery and delisting. Similarly, early conservation for candidates or species likely to become candidates can eliminate the need to develop a listing proposal.

For example, in FY 2003 in cooperation with the Department of Defense (DoD), the Service's Species At Risk (SAR) project was funded through the DoD Legacy Program to help prevent the need to list species by taking proactive conservation actions on and around military lands. The initial grant for a pilot effort targeted 4 of the over 500 at-risk species known to occur on military lands for development of management guidance identifying essential management actions that could, if implemented, stabilize or enhance the species. One aspect of follow up to this project involves the Service working with Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base, The Nature Conservancy and the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program to protect three of the four known populations of the Coastal Goldenrod (*Solidago villosicarpa*) that occur on the installation near Jacksonville, NC. The management guidance developed through the SAR project is being used to protect existing populations and initiate a long term monitoring program, and will still allow the military to accomplish training exercises on the base.

Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) are voluntary conservation agreements between the Service and one or more public or private parties. The Service works with its partners to identify threats to candidate species, plan the measures needed to stabilize and conserve them, identify willing landowners, develop agreements, and implement the conservation measures and monitor their effectiveness. An example of a successful multi-party conservation agreement, the Louisiana pine snake CCA covers suitable longleaf pine habitat in the Service's Southwest and Southeast Regions. Signed in December, 2003, this CCA established management protection for the Louisiana pine snake (*Pituophis ruthveni*) on National Forest lands in both Texas and Louisiana, on the Fort Polk Military Reservation in Louisiana and on certain private lands in Texas and Louisiana. The agreement established a framework for cooperation and participation in this rare snake's protection, conservation, and management. Additional cooperators include the U.S. Forest Service's Southern Research Station, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Temple-Inland Incorporated, a private timber company, became the 9th cooperator in this CCA in September 2004. The International Paper Corporation has recently expressed interest in this or a similar agreement.

As of December 31, 2004, the Service and our partners are actively pursuing conservation efforts in 105 approved CCAs to protect 165 candidate species. No doubt many other species benefit from the CCAs as well. Many of these agreements have successfully removed threats and avoided listing. In FY 2004, our goal was to make listing unnecessary for 4 species due to candidate conservation agreements and other conservation actions. We made substantial progress with a number of species, and formally determined that it was unnecessary to list three species in FY 2004 due to conservation agreements or conservation actions. Two of these species, the Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish (*Fallicambarus gordonii*) and Holsinger's cave beetle (*Pseudanophthalmus holsingeri*) were candidates, and the third species, the slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), had been proposed for listing.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) expand upon the success of traditional CCAs by providing to private landowners additional incentives for engaging in voluntary proactive conservation through assurances that limit future conservation obligations. One of the primary reasons why the Service developed the CCAA program was because of a concern by non-federal landowners

about the potential regulatory implications of having a listed species on private land. The CCAA program specifically targets non-federal landowners and provides the assurance that if conservation activities are implemented they will not be burdened with additional restrictions if the species becomes listed under the ESA.

The Otero County, NM, the Village of Cloudcroft, NM, the Lincoln National Forest and the Service signed a conservation plan for the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly in October 2004. The Service was under court order to make a final listing determination in 2004, and in late December announced the butterfly would not be listed due to improved information on the species status, the limited range of the species and the management actions that were included in the conservation plan. It is anticipated cooperators will move forward with a combination CCAA and CCA in the coming year.

In FY 2005, the Service is providing assistance to landowners to develop new CCAAs and continues to make progress on other ongoing efforts. For example, the Snake River Basin Fish and Wildlife Office continues to work with Joe Hinson and the Soulen Livestock Company to develop a Multi-Species CCAA in Idaho. The agreement proposes to cover approximately 500,000 acres of private and public land and includes 22 rare animal and plant species, including several candidate species such as the Southern Idaho ground squirrel. Parties to the effort include Soulen Livestock, the Bureau of Land Management, the State of Idaho, and the Service. Negotiations on the CCAA aspect are continuing and permit issuance is expected in 2006.

Reducing threats to species and their habitats before they become critically imperiled ultimately results in future conservation efforts that are less costly, flexible, and likely to result in successful conservation over time. Given the widespread support among the states and the Service's partners for the Candidate Conservation Program's proactive nature, we have numerous opportunities to continue with and expand upon the success of ongoing candidate conservation efforts, including those that are not part of a formalized agreement.

2004 Program Performance Accomplishments

In FY 2004, the major accomplishments in the Candidate Conservation Program include:

Strategic Plan-Based Performance Measures: Resource protection/sustained biological communities on DOI managed and influenced land and waters	FY 2004 Planned	FY 2004 Actual	Change	Reason of Change/Comment
Listing species-at-risk is made unnecessary due to conservation agreements	4	3	-1	The Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish was removed from the candidate list due to conservation efforts undertaken by the Mississippi National Guard and others in accordance with a candidate conservation agreement. Holsinger's cave beetle was removed from the candidate list due to conservation efforts by the State of Virginia. A final rule to list the slickspot peppergrass was not necessary due to conservation actions by the State of Idaho, U.S. Air Force, and Bureau of Land Management. We made progress on a candidate conservation agreement addressing the relict leopard frog, and expect to be able to remove the species from candidate status in FY 2005 based on the completed CCA.

- Assessed 308 species including: all currently on our candidate list to determine if they should be removed from the candidate list or have their listing priority number changed; and those identified as declining species to determine if they should be added to the candidate list.
- Prevented or removed threats to species through conservation actions, resulting in determinations that listing was no longer necessary for three species.
- Signed 6 CCAs, including a 10-year conservation agreement on 1,000 acres for the crinite mariposa lily, which occurs only in Douglas County, Oregon, with the Bureau of Land Management.
- Initiated assistance on three CCAAs.

2005 Planned Program Performance

The Service was provided an appropriation of \$9,255,000 for the Candidate Conservation Program to accomplish the following projections;

	FY 2004 Actual	FY 2005 Planned	Change	Explanation of Change
Listing species-at-risk is made unnecessary due to conservation agreements	3	4	+1	With further information on the development of conservation agreements for FY05, the Service anticipates the listing of the following four species will be unnecessary: 1) the relict leopard frog; 2) the Florida bog frog; 3) the Panama City crayfish; and 4) the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly.

- The Service plans to complete 320 assessments for current and potential candidates such as 8 Midwestern terrestrial snails (*Vertigo brierensis*, *Vertigo hubrichti hubrichti*, *Vertigo hubrichti variabilis*, *Vertigo iowaensis*, *Vertigo meramecensis*, *Catinella gelida*, *Novasuccinea* n. sp. *minnesota a*, and *Novasuccinea* n. sp. *minnesota b*). The Service is working with the University of Minnesota Duluth, Natural Resource Research Institute to complete a status assessment on these snail species. Although some survey work was completed in the early 1990's, there has since been no follow-up effort on terrestrial snails regarding species-specific population trends and distributional patterns, or research on potential threats to their existence.
- The Service's Maine and New England Field Offices will continue to work cooperatively with State agencies of Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, and New York, on assessing the status of the Northeast population of the Blanding's turtle, a species whose status has been of concern for over 10 years. Much of the assessment work is being done through the "Northeast Blanding's Turtle Working Group."
- An extension of the Service's cooperative DoD SAR project was funded by DOD in 2004, continuing through 2005. DOD and the Service will cooperate to group species with similar habitat needs found on and around four DoD installations in Georgia. Specific management guidelines will be developed based on these habitat groupings so that management can be undertaken through a habitat versus a species approach. Using this concept a greater number of species-at-risk will benefit. Preventing listing of species-at-risk through the management of particular habitats will help limit potential curtailment of operations, training and testing on military lands
- The Service also plans to continue to assist in the development of 35 CCAs, of which 5 are anticipated to be approved in FY 2005. CCAs can address the conservation needs of both candidate and at-risk species to remove threats to assure that they do not become candidates. For example, as part of a larger Conservation Strategy for Rio Grande cutthroat trout and Rio Grande chub, the Service is working on a CCA with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, Vermejo Park Ranch, the Rio Costilla Cooperative Livestock Association (Rio Costilla Land Grant), and the Forest Service. The goal of the agreement is to provide conservation and management for these species on public and private lands within the Rio Costilla watershed, which comprises a large portion of historic habitat.

The Service anticipates signing a candidate conservation agreement in 2005 with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the yellow-billed loon on the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska

(NPR-A). The yellow-billed loon is recognized as a potentially vulnerable species with more than 70% breeding in Alaska within the boundaries of NPR-A. The conservation agreement will provide a framework for implementing conservation measures necessary to protect yellow-billed loons within NPR-A. The BLM, the Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are working collaboratively to develop the conservation plan.

- The Service is currently providing assistance for 39 CCAAs. For example, in Montana, the Service is working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and other interested parties to develop a CCAA to improve habitat for the fluvial Arctic grayling in the Big Hole River. Habitat enhancements, such as increased instream flows and restored riparian corridors, will be achieved through improved irrigation and land use practices funded, in part, by conservation programs in the Farm Bill. Five CCAAs are anticipated to be completed and approved in FY 2005.
- The Pacific Region of the Service expects to make a final decision in early 2005 for the Southern Idaho Ground Squirrel Programmatic CCAA. The Agreement is a programmatic plan covering non-Federal lands in Adams, Washington, Payette, and Gem Counties and encompasses approximately 1,046,569 acres of historical southern Idaho ground squirrel habitat. Parties to the Agreement include the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, and the Service. Private landowners may also participate through Certificates of Inclusion.

Justification of 2006 Program Changes

Subactivity		2006 Budget Request	Program Changes (+/-)
Candidate Conservation	\$(000)	8,252	-1,176
	FTE	77	-

The FY 2006 budget request for Candidate Conservation is \$8,252,000 and 77 FTE, a programmatic decrease of \$1,176,000 from the 2005 enacted level.

General Program Activities (+\$106,000)

In 2006, the Service will utilize the increase to expand on our ability to provide technical assistance for developing CCAs, CCAAs, and conservation efforts with private landowners, States, tribes, territories, federal agencies and partners to conserve candidate species and other species for which potential listing is a concern.

Forest Plan (-\$382,000)

The FY 2006 President's Budget reduction to Candidate Conservation base Forest Plan funding from the FY 2005 enacted amount, reflects a reduction of Service efforts at conserving at-risk species in the range of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) consistent with the March 2004 joint Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service Record of Decision on survey and management mitigation measures standards and guidelines. The funding will provide increased flexibility to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities.

Idaho Sage Grouse (-\$296,000)

In FY 2005, the Service modified an existing cooperative agreement with the Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC), the Governor's oversight office for Federally listed, candidate, and petitioned species to transfer the funds for greater sage grouse conservation in Idaho. The Service passed through \$296,000 to the Idaho OSC to support greater sage grouse habitat improvement projects, sage grouse

research and management projects, and implementation of the Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan (Management Plan). The Service is not requesting additional or continued Candidate Conservation funding for this effort in FY 2006 since the State of Idaho and the Office of Species Conservation are eligible to apply for grant funding for sage grouse conservation actions or plan implementation through the Service's State Wildlife Grants program. After a recent status review, the Service determined that listing the greater sage grouse as threatened or endangered was not warranted.

Kootenai River Burbot (-\$148,000)

In FY 2005, Congress provided \$148,000 as a pass through to the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to provide funds for efforts to develop an ecosystem-based conservation strategy for burbot in the Kootenai River, Idaho. By the end of FY 2005, the Service expects to complete the conservation strategy for the at-risk population of burbot in the Kootenai River of Idaho and Kootenay Lake, British Columbia, and thus will not require additional or continued Candidate Conservation funding for this effort in FY 2006. Funds permitting, the Service will continue its participation with the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and the local Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative. The Service encourages the Tribe to consider applying for FY 2006 grant funding through either the Tribal Wildlife Program or the Tribal Landowners Incentive Program for future conservation projects implemented under the agreement.

Idaho Department of Agriculture Slickspot Peppergrass (-\$60,000)

In FY 2005, Congress authorized the establishment of an agreement with the Idaho Office of Species Conservation to transfer funds for the implementation of the Slickspot Peppergrass Candidate Conservation Agreement completed in January 2004. The Service's Snake River Fish and Wildlife Office is involved with the Idaho Office of Species Conservation, Idaho Department of Lands, U.S. Air Force, Idaho Army National Guard, and the Bureau of Land Management in the ongoing development and implementation of proactive conservation measures to conserve this plant species. Slickspot peppergrass is a plant species that was proposed for listing as endangered under the ESA on July 15, 2002. The listing proposal was withdrawn in January 2004 in reliance on full implementation of a Candidate Conservation Agreement and Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans. This Agreement that was a key part of the basis for determining that listing the species is unnecessary. Since the slickspot peppergrass is no longer a candidate species, these funds are better used for work on species which have threats that are of higher magnitude and imminence.

Tahoe Yellow Cress (-\$99,000)

In FY 2005, Congress provided \$99,000 to allow the Service to increase efforts to conserve the Tahoe yellow cress, a plant species that is a candidate for listing. The Service recently signed a conservation agreement for the Tahoe yellow cress with Federal, State, and local entities and private landowners and subsequently lowered its listing priority. Implementation of the agreement over time could preclude the need to list the species and ensure its protection throughout its range. As funding permits, the Service will continue to coordinate with the resource and regulatory agencies in the Tahoe Basin to conserve the Tahoe yellow cress. The Service encourages interested conservation groups to apply for grant funding through the Service's State Wildlife Grants program. The Service proposes to discontinue funding these efforts in FY 2006 to fund other priority conservation activities elsewhere in the budget request.

California Fisher (-\$296,000)

In FY 2005, Congress provided \$296,000 to plan and implement conservation actions for the west coast distinct population segment of the fisher, a candidate for listing under the ESA. Service staff worked with other State and Federal agencies and timber companies in California, Washington, and Oregon to develop and implement a conservation strategy which could preclude the need to list the fisher. A primary element of the conservation strategy is the reintroduction of fisher populations into portions of its former range. Key timber companies in California participated in these efforts. The State of Washington started some investigations on the feasibility of introduction efforts. The Service encourages interested conservation groups to apply for grant funding through the Service's State Wildlife Grants program.

Earmarks for specific species reduce the Service's flexibility to work on the highest priority issues. The fisher has a listing priority of 6, meaning that the threats are non-imminent. Since that is the case, the Service proposes to work on species which have threats that are of higher imminence.

Vehicle Reduction (-\$2,000)

The 2006 budget proposes a reduction of \$2,000 in the Endangered Species Candidate Conservation program to recognize expected savings to be achieved through improved fleet management within the Service and across the Department of Interior.