

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
2730 Loker Avenue West  
Carlsbad, California 92008  
Phone: 760-431-9440  
Fax: 760-431-9624

# News Release



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Contact: Jim Bartel, Jeff Newman or Jane Hendron, 760/431-9440

## **SERVICE PROPOSES CRITICAL HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED SAN BERNARDINO KANGAROO RAT**

Responding to a court order, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to designate critical habitat on approximately 55,408 acres of land in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, California, for the endangered San Bernardino kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys merriami parvus*). The acreage proposed for critical habitat includes a mix of Federal, Tribal, state, county, and private lands.

The San Bernardino kangaroo rat was emergency listed as endangered, under the Endangered Species Act, on January 27, 1998, and formally listed as endangered on September 24, 1998.

Critical habitat identifies geographic areas that are important for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. However, a designation does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands and does not close areas to all access or use. Rather, its impact is that federal agencies must consult with the Service on activities they undertake, fund, or permit that may affect critical habitat.

The San Bernardino kangaroo rat occurs in scattered, isolated patches of alluvial (loose, soft sand) sage-scrub habitat throughout San Bernardino and Riverside counties in southern California. Currently, there are six known locations of this species – along the Santa Ana River, Lytle and Cajon creeks, San Jacinto River and Bautista Creek, historic Etiwanda alluvial fan and the Etiwanda Wash, Reche Canyon, and Jurupa Hills.

The San Bernardino kangaroo rat is threatened by continued loss, degradation, and fragmentation of its habitat due to sand and gravel mining operations, flood control projects, and urban development. Three of the largest blocks of remaining habitat for the species are actively mined for sand and gravel, and mining activity in these areas is expected to increase.

The San Bernardino kangaroo rat is considerably darker and smaller than other kangaroo rat species. It is distinguished by its pale yellow and dusky brown fur with dark brown tail stripes, footpads, and tail hairs. Kangaroo rats are small, seed-eating mammals that live only in desert regions of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. They are uniquely adapted to survive with very little water. They live and breed in burrows and are active only at night when temperatures cool and there is minimum water evaporation on the desert floor. The kangaroo rat gets its name from large hind legs and feet that aid the tiny mammal when it jumps.

The Service has been working with landowners, flood control districts, and Federal and state agencies on habitat conservation for the kangaroo rat, and examining existing and proposed land uses in the areas where the species occurs. We are working with San Bernardino and Riverside counties and local jurisdictions to develop Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plans that would benefit the San Bernardino kangaroo rat.

“The designation of critical habitat should not affect our ongoing efforts to develop and implement HCPs,” said Michael J. Spear, Manager of the Service’s California/Nevada Operations Office.

During the listing process, the Service concluded that designation of critical habitat for the San Bernardino kangaroo rat was not prudent because such designation would not benefit the species and could lead to increased incidences of habitat vandalism or destruction. A lawsuit filed against the Service in 1999 by the Center for Biological Diversity and Christians Caring for Creation claimed the Service was in violation of the Act for not designating critical habitat at the time the species was listed. Today’s announcement is in response to a court order requiring the Service to propose critical habitat for the San Bernardino kangaroo rat by December 1, 2000.

To ensure a complete and comprehensive review of this proposal, the public should submit any additional information and data about the species or the economic or other impacts of the designation. A complete description of the Service’s proposal to designate critical habitat for the San Bernardino kangaroo rat will be published in the *Federal Register* on December 8, 2000. The proposed rule and other information can be downloaded from the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office’s website at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>.

The public is invited to submit data, information and comments in writing to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2730 Loker Avenue West, Carlsbad, California 92008. The comment period on the proposed rule closes at 5:00 p.m. on February 6, 2001. Requests for a public hearing must be received by January 22, 2001.

Comments may also be sent by electronic mail to [FW1CFWO\\_sbkr@fws.gov](mailto:FW1CFWO_sbkr@fws.gov). Please submit comments in ASCII file format and avoid the use of special characters and encryption. Please include “Attn: RIN 1018-AG59,” your name, and return address in the e-mail message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that your e-mail message was received, contact the Service directly by calling the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760-431-9440.

Comments and materials received, as well as supporting documentation used in the preparation of this proposed rule, will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 525 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.