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## **Recovery Plan Available for Endangered Laurel Dace**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is announcing the final Recovery Plan for the laurel dace, a federally listed endangered fish.

The laurel dace is a small fish native to the Tennessee River Basin in Tennessee that survives in three creek systems on the Walden Ridge of the Cumberland Plateau. Only a few individuals have been found from headwaters of two creek systems in the southern part of its range, Soddy and Sale creeks, while laurel dace are more abundant in headwaters of the Piney River system in its northern range. Historically, the fish once occupied seven streams and currently it is found in six of those.

“The recovery plan for laurel dace is a blueprint to recovery for this fish that the Service and its partners can take together,” said Leopoldo Miranda, the Service’s Southeast Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services. “We are continuing to work closely with partners like the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute and many others on several recovery efforts to benefit this fish, such as surveys and improvements to stream crossings.”

The final recovery plan for this endangered fish describes actions that may be necessary for the laurel dace’s recovery, establishes criteria for downlisting the fish to threatened and ultimately delisting it, and estimates the time and cost for implementing necessary recovery actions. These recommendations are based on what we know about this species today and may change as new science is developed.

The goal for this recovery plan is to conserve and recover populations of laurel dace to the point that listing under the Endangered Species Act is no longer necessary. When the criteria for delisting are met, robust, viable populations of laurel dace will occupy suitable habitat in all seven streams where the fish is known to have occurred historically. It will be necessary to conserve all existing populations by maintaining, and in some cases, restoring suitable habitat conditions in the streams where the fish currently occurs. It also will be necessary to discover or establish one additional population to ensure the laurel dace’s resiliency.

Delisting is a long-term goal for this fish because habitats are degraded in most streams where it occurs, limiting potential for population growth to occur in the near term. For this reason, an intermediate goal for this recovery plan is to recover the species to the point that it could be reclassified to threatened. Reclassification to threatened may be considered when robust populations of laurel dace occupy suitable habitat in the Bumbee, Moccasin, and Youngs creeks

and at least two of the following streams: Soddy or Cupp Creek or Horn Branch. At present, few of the dace's populations in these areas are considered viable.

Laurel dace are found in headwater tributaries, in pools or slow runs from undercut banks or under slab boulders. The vegetation surrounding the headwater streams where laurel dace live includes mountain laurel, rhododendron, and hemlocks.

Threats to the laurel dace include land use activities which affect silt levels (levels of small grains or particles of rock and dirt in the water), temperature, or hydrologic processes of these small tributaries; invasive species including sunfishes and basses; naturally small population size and geographic range; and climate change.

The Service will work with partners to inform the public about the laurel dace and measures that can be taken to sustain adequate flows, protect water quality, and reduce fragmentation of suitable habitats within streams where the species occurs. For example, the Service has recently worked with a private timber company, Timber Investment Resources, LLC, to replace a culvert that was blocking laurel dace movement in Bumbee Creek in Rhea County, Tennessee. Whenever possible, the Service and its partners will assist citizens and local governments in their efforts to reduce threats resulting from land use practices.

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Service will continue to work on establishing contacts and partnerships with landowners in the Piney River and Sale and Soddy creek systems to implement priority recovery actions for this fish.

Need a copy of the plan? Call (931) 525-4983, to request a copy. To view the recovery plan on the web, please visit either the Service's recovery plan web site at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/species/recovery-plans.html> or the Tennessee Field Office web site at <http://www.fws.gov/cookeville>.

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