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Contact: Phil Kloer, Philip_Kloer@fws.gov, 404-679-7299
Jennifer Koches, Jennifer_Koches@fws.gov, 843-300-0424

Service Reopens Public Comment Period for Proposed Delisting of Nashville Crayfish

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reopening the public comment period on the proposed delisting of the Nashville crayfish from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to recovery. The comment period reopening will provide an additional 30 days for all interested parties to comment on the proposed rule and participate in an information meeting and a separate public hearing. Comments previously submitted need not be resubmitted and will be fully considered in preparation of the final rule.

The Nashville crayfish inhabits only the Mill Creek Watershed of the greater Nashville, Tennessee area. Following a review of the best available science, the Service proposed delisting the Nashville crayfish due to recovery in November 2019. The review found that populations of the crayfish are healthy, stable and robust and that the species no longer meets the [definition of endangered or threatened](#) under the ESA.

The successful recovery of the crayfish is due to ESA-inspired partnerships following its listing under the ESA in 1986. Pitching in to help conserve and restore Mill Creek and recover the crayfish were the Nashville Zoo, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Mill Creek Watershed Association, private landowners and local developers. Surveys by partners and the Service located the species throughout the Mill Creek Watershed, including some waters where it had not previously been found.

“Reopening the comment period allows the Service to ensure that the latest information regarding the species is incorporated into the final rule. It also gives us an opportunity to provide the public with additional avenues of engagement in the form of a hearing and an informational meeting,” said Service regional director Leo Miranda. “We appreciate the input from our partners and look forward to working with them to ensure Nashville crayfish populations remain stable and healthy long after it is delisted.”

The Nashville crayfish grows to about seven inches long and, like all crayfish, has four pairs of walking legs and two pincers, called chelae. Its elongated pincers are orange and black at the tips and its light-colored saddle extends from its head down its sides. It eats insects, worms, algae, fish eggs, snails and mussels, and is preyed upon by raccoons, fish and reptiles. Crayfish are indicator species for healthy streams and rivers that support countless wildlife species and local communities that also depend on clean, abundant water resources.

If the Nashville crayfish is eventually delisted, the Mill Creek watershed would still be federally protected by the Clean Water Act and by state and local regulations.

The Service also announced in November 2019 the availability of a draft post-delisting monitoring (PDM) plan for the crayfish, in which the agency and conservation partners will monitor the status of populations for at least five years after it is delisted. We seek information, data and comments from the public regarding the proposal to delist this species and on the draft PDM plan.

All of the documents relating to these actions can be found at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2018-0062.

We will accept comments received or postmarked on or before October 23, 2020. The public can post comments at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2018-0062.

We have scheduled a public informational meeting and public hearing on this proposed rule for Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020, at 6 p.m. CST (meeting) and 7 p.m. CST (hearing). We are holding the public informational meeting and public hearing via the Zoom online video platform and via teleconference so that participants can attend remotely. We are holding the public meeting and hearing to present information about the November 26, 2019, proposed rule to delist the Nashville crayfish and to provide interested parties an opportunity to ask questions about the proposed rule.

For security purposes, registration is required. To listen and view the meeting and hearing via Zoom, listen to the meeting and hearing by telephone, or provide oral public comments at the public hearing by Zoom or telephone, you must register. For information on how to register, or if you encounter problems joining Zoom the day of the meeting, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/cookeville>.

Registrants will receive the Zoom link and the telephone number for the public informational meeting and public hearing. If applicable, interested members of the public not familiar with the Zoom platform should view the Zoom video tutorials (<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-video-tutorials>) prior to the public informational meeting and public hearing.

The public hearing will provide interested parties an opportunity to present verbal testimony (formal, oral comments) regarding the November 26, 2019, proposed rule to delist the Nashville crayfish (84 FR 65098). While the public informational meeting will be an opportunity for dialogue with the Service, the public hearing is not; it is a forum for accepting formal verbal testimony. In the event there is a large attendance, the time allotted for oral statements may be limited.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov/southeast. Connect with us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws>, and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.