

NEWS RELEASE

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DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN FOR ENDANGERED LAUREL DACE AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comment on the Technical/Agency Draft Recovery Plan for the laurel dace, a federally listed, endangered fish. Public comments will be accepted on this draft recovery plan until March 16, 2015.

Listed as endangered in 2011, the laurel dace is a small fish native to the Tennessee River Basin in Tennessee. The dace is found in three creek systems on the Walden Ridge of the Cumberland Plateau in Bledsoe, Rhea, and Sequatchie Counties. Historically, laurel dace were found in seven streams; but, now they are only found in six of the streams.

“The draft plan for laurel dace provides a road to recovery that the Service and its partners can take together,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “We are working closely with Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute on several recovery efforts to benefit this fish, such as surveys and improvements to stream crossings.”

Laurel dace live in headwater tributaries. This fish is found or collected from pools or slow runs from undercut banks or under slab boulders. The vegetation surrounding the first or second order streams where laurel dace occur include mountain laurel, rhododendron, and hemlocks.

Threats to the laurel dace include: land use activities which affect silt levels, temperature, or hydrologic processes of these small tributaries; invasive species including sunfishes, basses, or hemlock woolly adelgid; naturally small population size and geographic range; and climate change.

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 (ESA) is no longer necessary. In the dace’s draft recovery plan, actions are described for the species’ conservation. Criteria are established for downlisting the fish to threatened and delisting it, and a timeframe and cost are estimated for achieving recovery actions. When the criteria for delisting are met, robust populations of laurel dace will occupy all suitable habitat in seven clean streams surrounded by healthy watersheds, with fish passage barriers removed. Because delisting is a long-term goal for this fish, an intermediate goal is to recover the laurel dace to the point where it could be reclassified to threatened. When the recovery criteria for reclassification are met, robust populations of laurel dace will occupy all suitable habitat in five clean streams surrounded by healthy watersheds, with fish passage barriers removed. Although the estimated cost and time period required for

downlisting laurel dace to threatened status cannot be determined as yet, the Service estimates that the initial five years of implementing this recovery plan will cost \$1,225,000.

The Service will work with partners to inform the public about 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 dace occurs. Whenever possible, the Service and other 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 working 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.

Please send written comments about the Technical/Agency Draft Recovery Plan for the Laurel Dace to: Geoff Call, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, Tennessee, 38501. Need a copy of the plan? Call (931) 525-4983, to request a copy. To view the draft 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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