



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (5:26)

OCELOT (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH JODY MAYS)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there, this is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Jody Mays, Fish and Wildlife biologist at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Jody, are you there?

MS. MAYS: Yah, I'm here. How are you doing?

MS. LEON: Doing just fine, Jody. Could you talk to us today about the ocelot?

MS. MAYS: Sure thing. The ocelot is an endangered, wild cat that occurs in the U.S. It's one of the rarest wild cats in the U.S. It used to range in Arizona, through central Texas, all the way up to the edges of Louisiana and Arkansas. Today it's found only in the southern most part of Texas, in the very lower Rio Grande valley.

Our best estimate is that there are fewer than 50 individuals left in the U.S. We only know of two breeding populations, and both of those are in extreme southern Texas. One of those is centered here at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

MS. LEON: So what happened to this species?

MS. MAYS: The primary factors with the ocelot are habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. In the early 1900s through the 1940s and '50s, there was a lot of conversion of land and changes in land uses. A lot of native habitat got cleared in Texas and in the valley area. The primary advantage to the ocelot is camouflage—that's one of its main strategies is to hide and be hidden. And so it uses thick, dense habitat. Our best estimate is that over 90

percent of that thick, dense habitat in south Texas has been eliminated. So that's the biggest problem that we've had.

Then you get other factors that plays into that and that add to the reasons for its decline. As the large tracts of habitat—that was once contiguous habitat—got roads put through and pieces of it taken out for housing or agriculture, then the large pieces got broken up into fragments. So then you've got habitat fragmentation where there could be a piece of land that has good habitat on it, but the ocelot can't get to it to use it. As the ocelots got cornered and isolated into smaller and smaller fragments of habitat they would try to go to reach these other pieces, but they would be hit by vehicles. Road mortality has become a big concern and is actually the number one cause of death for the ocelots that are left in the U.S.

And since they have been isolated through the habitat loss and habitat fragmentation for years now, they've inbred because they don't have anywhere to go. The numbers have gotten really small, and so they're losing genetic diversity and they're becoming more vulnerable to things like disease as a result.

The ocelot situation is pretty dire in the U.S. We are really concerned about them going extinct, so they are really in need of our help right now.

MS. LEON: So what's being done now to help recover this species?

MS. MAYS: We're trying to attack those threats and concerns on all the different fronts. For the habitat loss, we're trying to work with interested landowners to replant habitat in areas where it has been cleared previously. And for the fragmentation, we are working on creating corridors of habitat that will reconnect the areas, even reconnect the two populations and reconnect the U.S. populations to other ocelot populations in Mexico and Central and South America. That will also help with the genetic diversity. We're also working with state transportation department to try and install crossing so ocelots and other wildlife can go underneath roads rather than cross them and risk getting hit.

We've had some really positive developments this last year, which has been great. We were able to revise the 1990 Ocelot Recovery Plan. The draft of that plan is now out and available for public input. Also, in recent months, there was an ocelot photographed in Arizona with a trip camera. That's the first time an ocelot has been documented in Arizona since 1964. There have been sightings and such, but no actual proof of an ocelot in Arizona. So that's good news that they may be trying to reestablish there.

MS. LEON: I hear that there's a lot of public support backing this species recovery. Tell us about this, will you?

MS. MAYS: Yah, there are a number of partners that work with us and public involvement with the ocelot. We have several landowners that we are working with to try and build up habitat. And we do a partnership with our Friends of Laguna Atascosa. That's a non-profit group that's of private citizens and the public that want to help support ocelot recovery.

And we do an annual event with that friends group here called the Ocelot Conservation Festival. That raises awareness about ocelots and other wildlife as well. We get all kinds of live animal exhibits and things that go on there to help let the public know about this really special and unique animal that we have here in Texas, and that we will hopefully continue to have with that public support.

MS. LEON: Thank you, Jody, so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

MS. MAYS: Thank you very much.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.