

News Release



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Agencies Conserve Imperiled Species in Eastern Kentucky; Propose delisting for one plant, and positive steps for a darter

Stanton, Ky. – State and Federal conservation agencies came together here today to celebrate partnerships that are delivering conservation successes in eastern Kentucky.

After more than two decades of collaboration and conservation work in the Daniel Boone National Forest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to remove the white-haired goldenrod – a plant unique to eastern Kentucky – from the list of threatened and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Daniel Boone National Forest and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission played leading roles in the white-haired goldenrod’s recovery. White-haired goldenrod is only found in sandstone rock shelters or on sandstone cliffs with overhanging ledges in the Red River Gorge region of eastern Kentucky. When the plant was listed as threatened in 1988, threats included the loss of habitat due to recreational activities such as rock climbing, hiking, camping, and rappelling; artifact collection; and a proposed reservoir project.

“The Daniel Boone National Forest began a project to fence white-haired goldenrod sites affected by recreational use in about 2003,” said Bill Lorenz, forest supervisor for the Daniel Boone National Forest. “We asked the public to help us protect the plant by staying out of the fenced rock shelters where some damage was occurring. We were pleased at how quickly members of the public acknowledged our request and complied.”

“The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission has been monitoring white-haired goldenrod in the Red River Gorge for more than 20 years,” said Donald S. Dott, Jr., director Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission. “While recreational impact to some of the populations has occurred, the majority of the plant’s populations have been stable for well over 10 years. We believe that with an annual monitoring program, public education, and an effective management plan coordinated by several agencies and conservation groups, this unique and rare goldenrod will be protected.”

“We are thankful for the great efforts of the U.S. Forest Service and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission that helped us guide the white-haired goldenrod toward recovery,” said Mike Oetker, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Southeast Deputy Regional Director. “The proposed delisting of the white-haired goldenrod demonstrates that the Endangered Species Act works, and we will continue to

work with our conservation partners to monitor and manage the plant's populations.”

At the same time, the two federal agencies also are stepping up to proactively conserve the Kentucky arrow darter, a candidate for protection under the ESA. Through a Candidate Conservation Agreement signed today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service are committing to take actions that will protect the small fish found in some of the small, headwater streams of the Daniel Boone National Forest. The Red Bird Ranger District of the Daniel Boone National Forest is a stronghold for the darter. Populations of the Kentucky arrow darter in the Daniel Boone National Forest and the University of Kentucky's Robinson Forest constitute almost 49 percent of the species' remaining occupied habitat. Habitat loss and degradation represent the most significant threats to the darter.

This commitment to proactive, voluntary conservation will ensure needed management actions for the Kentucky arrow darter will occur. Some improvements under this agreement include replacing culverts impeding the Kentucky arrow darter's natural movements and developing a forest-wide monitoring program for the fish.

“The Candidate Conservation Agreement is the latest step to proactively address at-risk species throughout the Southeast,” said Southern Regional Forester Tony Tooke. “The CCA is another example of the long-standing partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service, which has produced multiple CCAs over the past several years.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will decide whether to protect the Kentucky arrow darter under the ESA later this fall. This decision is part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan under a Multi-District Listing Agreement aimed at addressing a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA listing program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce a litigation-driven workload. For more information about the work plan, see <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/>.

This settlement and others led to a broader partner-driven effort in the Southeast to more fully use flexibilities within the ESA to put the right conservation in the right places and benefit imperiled species. The proactive effort for the Kentucky arrow darter is part of this collaborative strategy to boost plant and wildlife populations and habitat before they need protection under the ESA.

The proposed delisting of the white-haired goldenrod follows a comprehensive review by the Service of the best available scientific and commercial information concerning the plant's status as required by the ESA. Along with the goldenrod's proposed delisting, the Service is announcing a draft post-delisting monitoring plan for the plant. The public is invited to submit comments on the delisting proposal and the draft post-delisting monitoring plan for 60 days through November 2, 2015.

Over the last 21 years, the Daniel Boone National Forest redirected trails, installed and maintained protective fencing around sensitive locations where the plant is found, completed numerous back-country patrols near white-haired goldenrod habitats, and placed informational signs at rock shelters, picnic areas, and trailheads that provided information about the plant and ways the public could avoid impacting it. The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission completed multiple status surveys for the species from 1996 to 2013, including an intensive range-wide effort in 2008-2009. These surveys documented each occurrence's population size and viability, habitat condition, and the severity of the threats facing each population. The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission also prepared a variety of fact sheets and posters that educated the public about the plant and how to protect its populations.

Currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Daniel Boone National Forest and the Kentucky State

Nature Preserves Commission are working to finalize a cooperative management agreement that will provide for the plant's long-term protection. The management agreement outlines conservation actions that will benefit the goldenrod.

Written comments concerning the proposed delisting of the white-haired goldenrod or its draft post-delisting monitoring plan should be submitted by accessing the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments on Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2014-0054. Comments also can be mailed to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters, MS. ES, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA, 22041-3803, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2014-0054.

For more information about the proposed delisting of white-haired goldenrod, please visit <http://fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/plant/white-haired-goldenrod> or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Kentucky Ecological Services Field Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/frankfort/>.

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