

News Bulletin

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Service Seeks More Input on Habitat Needs of Imperiled Caribou

Comment Period Opens on the 2014 Proposed Rule to Reaffirm the 2012 Final Designation of Critical Habitat for Southern Selkirk Mountain Population of Woodland Caribou

BOISE, Idaho – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is seeking public comment on its 2014 proposed rule to reaffirm the 2012 designation of critical habitat for the southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*).

The southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou occupies high-elevation habitat in the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho, northeastern Washington, and southern British Columbia. The population was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1984 without designated critical habitat. At the time, the designation of critical habitat was determined to be not prudent, since increased poaching could result from the publication of maps showing areas used by the species.

In response to litigation, the Service first proposed 375,562 acres of critical habitat in 2011. The final critical habitat designation published in 2012, reduced the designation to 30,010 acres in Idaho's Boundary County and Washington's Pend Oreille County. The final designation in 2012 followed 150 days of public involvement and extensive analysis that included public information meetings, hearings, comment periods, scientific peer review, and a reexamination of information regarding occupancy at the time of the caribou listing.

This public comment period on the 2014 proposed rule to reaffirm the 2012 final designation of 30,010 acres of critical habitat is in response to a ruling in 2015 by the U.S. District Court for the District of Idaho (Court) that the Service made a procedural error by not providing for adequate public review and comment on the 2012 designation.

The Service is thus opening the current 30-day public comment period, and invites the public to review and comment on the proposed reaffirmation of the 2012 final designation of critical habitat. **Written comments must be received on or before May 19, 2016.**

To submit written comments, please use one of the following methods:

- *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–R1–ES–2012–0097, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Final Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”
- *By hard copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R1–ES–2015–0180; Division of Policy and Directives, Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041–3803.

For more information about the southern Selkirk Mountains population of woodland caribou, and to read the Federal Register notice, visit: <http://1.usa.gov/1Jeq6cb>. For more information about critical habitat, visit: <http://go.usa.gov/3GTdj>.

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