



News Release

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region External Affairs Office

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SERVICE WILL NOT CONDUCT IN-DEPTH REVIEW TO CONSIDER EXPANDING INDIANA BAT CRITICAL HABITAT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reviewed a petition to expand critical habitat designated under the Endangered Species Act for the Indiana bat, an endangered species found in the eastern half of the United States, and concluded the petition does not contain substantial scientific data to indicate the expansion is warranted. The negative petition finding was published in the *Federal Register*.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act describing geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a species and which may require special management or protection.

The Service received a petition from eight conservation groups and individuals in 2002, asking the agency to expand its existing critical habitat designation for the Indiana bat, which currently includes important hibernation caves and mines used by the species during winter. The petitioners sought to add areas used by the bat during the summer, which includes forested habitat throughout the species' 20-state range in the eastern United States.

Under the Act, in a process known as a 90-day finding, the Service is required to review the petition to decide whether it contains substantial scientific information that the request may be warranted. Typically, a 12-month finding is only conducted if the Service determines the petition contains substantial information on the requested revision. However, in this situation, the Service elected to respond as if a positive 90-day finding had been made and also make a 12-month finding.

This finding was prepared under a court settlement that resulted from a lawsuit filed against the Service by many of the petitioners. The Service was prevented from meeting

its deadline for the 90-day finding because budget limitations require the agency to focus on other high-priority issues.

Indiana bats are found over most of the eastern half of the United States. The 2005 population estimate is about 457,000 Indiana bats, about half as many as when the species was listed as endangered in 1967. However, the Indiana bat population has shown increases during the most recent surveys. Almost half of all Indiana bats (207,000 in 2005) hibernate in caves in southern Indiana.

A copy of the finding on revision of Indiana bat critical habitat is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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