

News Release

Midwest Region



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to List Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake as Threatened Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to list the eastern massasauga rattlesnake as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The Service will not propose critical habitat for the species, deeming it not prudent.

Eastern massasaugas are found in scattered locations in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada. The species, which has been a candidate for listing since 1999, has been declining over the past decades due to loss of its wetland habitat and intentional killing by people who fear the snake. More than 30 percent of the historical populations are now extirpated and many more (20 percent) are of uncertain status. Of those populations that are known to remain, most are experiencing ongoing threats, meaning additional population losses are anticipated in the future.

The timid eastern massasauga is a small snake with a thick body, heart-shaped head and vertical pupils. The average length of an adult is about 2 feet. The snake's tail has several dark brown rings and is tipped by gray-yellow rattles. Massasaugas eat small rodents such as mice and voles, but they will sometimes eat frogs and other snakes. People's fear of the massasauga and the species' resultant persecution are largely unwarranted. These are docile, secretive snakes that will try to escape rather than fight.

Massasaugas live in wet prairies, marshes and low areas along rivers and lakes. In many areas massasaugas also use adjacent uplands during part of the year. They often hibernate in crayfish burrows but they may also be found under logs and tree roots or in small mammal burrows. Massasaugas use a mix of wetland and upland habitat that is important to many other species of wildlife as well as to humans. Wetland habitats increase groundwater resources and improve water quality.

The eastern massasauga is currently listed as endangered, threatened or a species of concern under state or provincial laws in every state and province in which it lives. The Service and partners have been working together to conserve eastern massasauga populations since the species was named a candidate in 1999.

The Service's proposal appears in the September 30, 2015, *Federal Register*, opening a 60-day public comment period. You may submit comments by one of the following methods:

(1) *Electronically*: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R3-ES-2015-0145, 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 Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) *By hard copy*: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R3–ES–2015–0145; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

We request that you send comments **only** by the methods described above. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

After the comment period closes, the Service will consider all available information before determining whether to list the eastern massasauga under the Endangered Species Act.

For more information about the eastern massasauga and the Service’s proposal to list the snake under the Endangered Species Act, go www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/reptiles/eama/

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

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