Questions and Answers

12-month not-warranted finding on petition to list the U.S. population of the northwestern subspecies of moose under the Endangered Species Act

1. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?
The Service is announcing a not-warranted 12-month finding on a petition to list the United States portion of the northwestern subspecies of moose, historically found in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin, as a distinct population segment (DPS) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The finding is in response to a 2015 petition from the Center for Biological Diversity and Honor the Earth. Before making this finding, the Service conducted a status review, and gathered and analyzed available information, including new information received during an open information request period.

2. What is a petition?
A petition is a request filed under the ESA by an interested party asking that a species be listed, delisted, or reclassified under the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. The ESA requires that the Service makes and publishes specific findings on the petition. The agency must make a finding within 90 days of receiving a petition (to the extent practicable) as to whether or not there is "substantial information" indicating that the petitioned listing may be warranted, called a "90-day finding." If this preliminary finding is positive, the Service conducts a status review of the petitioned species. Upon completion of the status review, the Service issues a "12-month finding" indicating whether the petitioned action is warranted.

3. Who petitioned the Service and what did they request?
The Center for Biological Diversity and Honor the Earth submitted a petition on July 9, 2015, to the Service to list the U.S. population of northwestern moose as a threatened or endangered DPS. On June 3, 2016, the agency made a 90-day finding that the information provided in the petition and supporting information submitted with the petition, provided substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing may be warranted. The Service then initiated a status review, which helped determine a 12-month finding.

4. What is a 12-month finding?
The Endangered Species Act requires the Service to determine if a petition to list a species contains substantial information to support the requested action. If this preliminary (90-day) finding is positive, a status review is initiated. Within one year of receipt of the petition, the Service must make a further finding, called a 12-month finding, that the listing either is or is not warranted.

5. What did the Service's status review conclude?
The Endangered Species Act defines "species" broadly to include subspecies and (for vertebrates) distinct population segments (DPS). The petitioners requested that a DPS of the northwestern moose subspecies, consisting of the U.S. portion of the range only, be considered for listing. After reviewing the status of the petitioned population in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota and Wisconsin, and gathering information from these states, as well as tribes and Canadian provinces where the subspecies occurs, the Service found that this population does not meet the criteria for a DPS and therefore cannot be designated as endangered or threatened. Specifically, the agency found that the U.S. population of northwestern moose does not meet the criteria for "discreteness" as a DPS.

6. What factors did the Service consider when determining that this population of moose did not meet Endangered Species Act criteria as a distinct population segment?
The Service looked for discreetness in antler size, reproductive behavior, moose harvest regulations, habitat management and the moose's conservation status within the range of the northwestern moose in the U.S. and Canada. The agency did not find information that shows a difference between the populations in the U.S. and Canada based on physical, physiological, ecological or behavior factors. The agency also did not find differences in exploitation, habitat management, conservation status or regulatory mechanisms between the two populations.

7. Where is the U.S. population of northwestern moose found?
The petition requested the Service to list moose as a DPS in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, westward across the northern counties of Wisconsin and Minnesota and into northeastern North Dakota. Moose subspecies occurring in other parts of the country, including the Northeast, Rocky Mountains and Alaska, were not addressed in the petition and were not included in the status review.

8. What is the current legal status of the northwestern moose in its historical U.S. range?
In North Dakota, where there is a fall hunting season, the statewide population of northwestern moose is stable or increasing. In Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin there is no hunting season for moose. Minnesota's population experienced a sharp decline before hunting was discontinued in 2013. In Michigan, the northwestern subspecies occurs only on Isle Royale National Park, where the population is increasing. Moose occasionally sighted in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and in northern counties of Wisconsin are not believed to belong to the northwestern subspecies.

9. Does the Service's findings affect moose populations outside the Upper Midwest?
No. The Service's findings pertain only to the northwestern moose subspecies, which historically occurred in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota.

10. Where can I find the Service's 12-month petition finding on the U.S. population of northwestern moose?

Read more about the Service's finding on the northwestern moose.