

Due to the government shutdown, our agency was unable to inform you about the spring pygmy sunfish being listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act on October 2. By now, you may already be aware of this, but - just in case you did not see it in the media - below is a copy of the news release, for your information.

And, if you would like more details on the spring pygmy sunfish, you can visit our Mississippi Field Office website at: <http://www.fws.gov/mississippiES/endsp.html>

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Service Protects Sunfish Under Endangered Species Act

The spring pygmy sunfish, a tiny fish found only in Alabama, will now be protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as a threatened species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

This sunfish is a spring-associated fish that only lives in the Beaverdam Spring/Creek system in the Tennessee River drainage in Limestone County, Alabama. Historically, this sunfish was found at two other sites in north Alabama.

The Service proposed the spring pygmy sunfish for protection last fall due to threats to the fish and its habitat that include increased groundwater and surface water usage, excessive storm-water runoff containing pesticides, herbicides, and suspended sediment, and future urban and industrial development. The species continues to experience these threats, and its population continues to decline because of water pollution and a reduction of water quantity.

The Service held a 60-day public comment period last October, and then a 30-day comment period this past May, allowing the public to review and comment on its proposal to list the species and designate critical habitat. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, and other interested parties was considered and addressed in the agency's final listing determination. The decision to add the spring pygmy sunfish to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants is based on the best scientific information available. A final decision on the proposed critical habitat designation for this sunfish will be announced in the *Federal Register* in the near future.

The Service will continue to work with conservation partners to aid the species' recovery and address current and future threats. For example, on June 7, 2012, the Service entered into a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) with Belle Mina Farm, Ltd. and the Huntsville and North Alabama Land Trust to protect a portion of Beaverdam Spring/Creek. Even though the spring pygmy sunfish is listed, the landowner involved with the Belle Mina Farm, Ltd. CCAA will not have to meet any additional requirements, other than those already

specified in the agreement. The Service is reviewing two additional CCAAs with adjacent landowners. These CCAAs are currently undergoing public review, and the Service will make final decisions on their issuance prior to the effective date of the final listing rule, December 2, 2013.

The Service relies on a number of voluntary, non-regulatory conservation programs, such as the Belle Mina Farm, Ltd. CCAA, to provide willing landowners with assurances to protect them for the work they do on their lands.

Even with the beneficial effects of the conservation measures in the Belle Mina Farm, Ltd agreement, and other proposed agreements, threats still remain for this sunfish to the level that listing is warranted. The Service values the conservation relationships that have been established throughout the range of the sunfish and will continue to work proactively with other landowners and stakeholders to enact additional conservation measures that will reduce threats to the species.

The listing of the spring pygmy sunfish under the Endangered Species Act becomes effective on December 2, 2013, 60 days following the October 2, 2013 publication in the *Federal Register*. The ultimate goal of the ESA is the recovery of this listed sunfish, so that it no longer needs the protective measures of the ESA. The next step is development of a recovery plan that provides a guidebook for the Service and its conservation partners to address threats to the spring pygmy sunfish's survival and recovery.

When completed, the recovery plan will be available on the Service's website:

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered>

Public and private landowners must comply with provisions of the ESA to protect threatened and endangered species on their lands. It is illegal under the ESA to kill, harm or otherwise "take" a listed species, or to possess, import, export or conduct interstate or international commerce without authorization from the Service. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or undertake do not jeopardize the existence of listed species.

This spring pygmy sunfish listing decision is part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan that resolves a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA listing program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce litigation-driven workloads and allow the agency to focus its resources on the species most in need of the ESA's protections over the next five years.

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. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>