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## **Endangered Species Act Protection Not Needed for Four Southeastern Animals**

Responding to requests to add them to the federal threatened and endangered species list, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that the angular dwarf crayfish, Icebox Cave beetle, Clifton Cave beetle, and the Virgin Island coqui do not need such protection.

“To receive Endangered Species Act protection, the species must be facing threats that would likely cause extinction or threaten existence in the foreseeable future,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “They face little to no apparent threat or are the focus of ongoing conservation efforts enabling them to overcome threats.”

Previous reviews found that the two cave beetles warranted inclusion on the Endangered Species Act’s (ESA) list of protected wildlife and plants, but doing so was precluded by higher-priority species. With this decision, the Service has reconsidered those species, taking into account recent conservation efforts, species abundance, and changes in threats. This decision marks the first time the Service has considered the angular dwarf crayfish for the endangered species list. In January 2014, the Service published a 90-Day finding stating that the Virgin Islands coqui, a small frog, may warrant listing under the ESA. The Service examined the best historical and current information for the coqui to make its determination in this 12-month finding.

**Angular dwarf crayfish:** Typically measuring less than an inch long, this is one of the smallest crayfishes in the northern hemisphere. It is found in heavily vegetated ponds, sluggish streams, and backwater areas in Baldwin, Mobile, and Washington counties, Alabama, and George County, Mississippi. Though little is known about the crayfish, its habitat is abundant, and there is no indication that it faces any significant threats.

**Clifton Cave beetle:** This beetle is known from only two caves in Woodford County, Kentucky. It was discovered in Clifton Cave in 1963 after an opening to the previously unknown cave was inadvertently created during road construction. That opening was closed in the mid-1960s, likely preventing any direct human impact to the beetle. Four individuals were discovered in nearby Richardson’s Spring Cave in 1994 where several beetles were observed again in 2015. The caves are in a rural landscape with no significant threats to the beetle.

**Icebox Cave beetle:** This beetle was discovered in 1963 in Icebox Cave, Bell County, Kentucky – its only known location. Search efforts in 2015 found the beetle persisting in the cave at numbers consistent with previous searches. Although the cave shows evidence of human use and

visitation, in recent years it seems to have remained largely untouched. This cave is also in a rural landscape with no significant threats to the beetle.

**Virgin Islands coqui:** This small frog was historically found on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands. However, the species has not been seen sighted there since the 1970's, and is considered extirpated from the island. The Virgin Islands coqui is still found on six of the nine islands where it historically occurred in the British Virgin Islands: Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, Great Dog, Beef Island, and Frenchman's Cay. Management efforts by the government of the British Virgin Islands have benefitted this tree-dwelling, terrestrial frog. Protected areas have been established to help maintain existing forests and allow deforested areas to recover. The economy of the British Virgin Islands also has shifted from a cash crop economy to a tourist-based economy, and the change also helps conserve the coqui's habitat. Therefore, the Service finds the coqui is not in danger of extinction throughout all of its range.

The ESA allows anyone to petition the Service to include a species on the endangered species list. The decisions on these three animals come as the Service works through hundreds of requests that have come from outside groups in recent years, with the Service taking a two-pronged approach of evaluating the petitions as required by law and emphasizing conserving plants and animals before they need the protection of the Endangered Species Act. This has led to a broader partner-driven effort in the Southeast to more fully use flexibilities within the Endangered Species Act to put the right conservation in the right places, benefit imperiled species, keep working lands working and reduce regulatory burden. Since the beginning of the Service's focus on these at-risk plants and animals, 72 species have not required listing as a result of conservation efforts, additional information, reevaluation of stressors, or withdrawn petitions.

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