

## News Release

### Service Proposes to List the Black Pinesnake as Threatened

October 6, 2014

Contact: Connie Dickard, 601-321-1121, [connie\\_dickard@fws.gov](mailto:connie_dickard@fws.gov)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to list the black pinesnake as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with a proposed section 4(d) rule. If finalized, this 4(d) rule would exempt certain activities from the take prohibitions of the ESA that would positively affect black pinesnake populations and provide an overall conservation benefit to the snake. These activities include herbicide treatments, prescribed burning, restoration along river banks and stream buffers, and some intermediate timber treatments.

This harmless snake is only found in the longleaf pine forests of southern Mississippi and Alabama. Longleaf pine habitat once covered roughly 90 million acres across much of the Southeastern United States and over several decades shrunk to around three million acres in the 1990s. A large partnership of conservation agencies, non-profits, and businesses are taking steps to reverse that decline.

The public is invited to comment on the proposed listing of the black pinesnake as threatened with a proposed 4(d) rule for the next 60 days through December 8, 2014. A threatened species is defined as one which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

“The black pinesnake is an important part of the longleaf pine ecosystem in southern Alabama and Mississippi,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “Conservation efforts for the black pinesnake align closely with efforts already ongoing in this ecosystem for other wildlife like the gopher tortoise, eastern indigo snake, dusky gopher frog, and the red-cockaded woodpecker.”

Conservation actions taken for the snake also provide for hundreds of other species in the same longleaf pine habitat.

The black pinesnake has been a candidate for federal protection since 1999. The proposed listing of the black pinesnake is part of the Service’s efforts to implement a court-approved work plan under a Multi-District Listing Agreement aimed at addressing a series of lawsuits concerning the agency’s ESA listing program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce a litigation-driven workload. For more information, please see <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/>

The final decision to add the black pinesnake to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants will be based on the best scientific information available. All relevant information received during the open comment period from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties will be considered and addressed in the Service’s final listing determination for the species.

Black pinesnakes are non-venomous, egg-laying constrictors. Adults range in size from 48 to 76 inches. They are dark brown to black on both their upper and lower body surfaces, have small heads with pointed snouts, and are good burrowers. Habitat for these snakes consists of sandy, well-drained soils with an open-canopied forest cover of longleaf pine, a reduced shrub layer, and a dense, vegetative ground cover.

There are currently 11 populations of the black pinesnake known in 11 counties in Mississippi (Forrest, George, Greene, Harrison, Jackson, Jones, Lamar, Marion, Perry, Stone, and Wayne) and three counties in Alabama (Clarke, Mobile, and Washington). Some populations span areas in multiple, nearby counties. The black pinesnake has not been seen in Louisiana in more than 30 years and is considered eliminated from the state.

This snake's decline is attributed to the loss and degradation of the longleaf pine ecosystem. Longleaf pine forests declined because of the increase in roads which caused habitat fragmentation, fire suppression, conversion of natural pine forests to pine plantations, and agricultural and urban development. Other threats to the snake's survival include road mortality and killing by humans.

Comments and information may be submitted by one of two ways: (1) online at <http://www.regulations.gov> by entering FWS-R4-ES-2014-0046 in the search box and then clicking on "Comment Now"; or (2) mail or hand delivery to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2014-0046. You also can U.S. mail or hand-deliver comments to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2014-0046, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803. All comments received will be posted on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). Request for a public hearing must be made in writing by November 21, 2014, to the Falls Church, VA, address.

The complete proposal can be obtained by visiting the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2014-0046. A copy also can be obtained by contacting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Suite A, Jackson, Mississippi 39213; phone 601-321-1121.

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, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast](http://www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast](http://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>

###