

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release



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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WILL NOT CONDUCT IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF REQUEST TO LIST PYGMY RABBIT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed a petition to list the pygmy rabbit under the Endangered Species Act (Act) and concluded that the petition does not contain substantial scientific information to move ahead with a more detailed study of the species. The finding was published in the *Federal Register* on May 20, 2005.

The Service made the determination in response to a petition received on April 23, 2003, from Western Watersheds Project, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Center for Native Ecosystems, Committee for the High Desert, Oregon Natural Desert Association, and Mr. Craig Criddle, to list pygmy rabbit as a threatened or endangered species throughout its entire range of eight states. Under the Act, the Service is required to review the petition to determine whether it contains substantial scientific information that warrants a more thorough (12 month) review.

“While we will continue to monitor the pygmy rabbit, this petition does not contain sufficient information for us to take the next step toward a year-long review,” said Bob Williams, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Field Supervisor for Nevada. “More research is needed to better determine the distribution and abundance of the species throughout its range.”

The pygmy rabbit is a member of the family Leporidae, which includes hares and rabbits. It is the smallest Leporid in North America. Adults weigh approximately one pound and are approximately one foot in length.

Pygmy rabbits are typically found in areas of tall, dense sagebrush, and are highly dependent on sagebrush to provide both food and shelter throughout the year. Their diet in the winter consists almost exclusively of sagebrush.

The pygmy rabbit historical range includes portions of the following states: California, Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Washington. Although the pygmy rabbit occurs in Washington, that state was not included in this review. The Columbia Basin Distinct Population Segment of the pygmy rabbit was listed in the State of Washington as endangered on March 5, 2003. The pygmy rabbit is believed to be one of only two Leporids in Northern America that digs its own

burrows. Pygmy rabbit burrows are typically found in relatively deep, loose soils of wind-borne or water-born origin. They occasionally make use of burrows abandoned by other species and as a result, may occur in areas of shallower or more compact soils that support sufficient shrub cover.

This finding was prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by Western Watersheds Project, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, Center for Native Ecosystems, and Oregon Natural Desert Association.

A copy of the finding about pygmy rabbit is available on the Internet at <http://nevada.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office at (775) 861-6300.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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