

**For Immediate Release**

**News Release: Wyoming Game and Fish**

Contact:

Wyoming Game and Fish: Jeff Obrecht (307) 777-4600

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Diane Katzenberger (303) 236-7917

*(This story is being released jointly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)*

**SWIFT FOX DOING WELL ENOUGH TO AVOID THREATENED SPECIES LIST**

DENVER – Based on the availability of new biological information, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service no longer believes that the swift fox should be listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This decision removes it from consideration for listing based on its current status.

In response to a petition to list the swift fox, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife determined in 1995 that a threatened listing was warranted but did not proceed with a listing action because resources necessary to complete the listing process were unavailable.

The warranted but precluded finding prompted state wildlife agencies, including the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, within the species current and historic range to form the Swift Fox Conservation Team to work cooperatively on swift fox management and conservation. The team, in coordination with other interested parties, assembled existing information, collected new biological data, and implemented swift fox monitoring and management programs.

In an assessment of the species' current status, the service concluded that although the swift fox has been reduced across much of its historical range, viable populations currently occur in approximately 40 percent of those areas formerly occupied. The species also appears to be more adaptable to a wide range of habitat types and more tolerant of modified land uses than previously believed. Furthermore, the continuing efforts of the Conservation Team indicate that management activities for this species will be carefully considered in the future.

Successful reintroduction efforts in Canada, partly from wild brood stock obtained in Wyoming, and on Blackfeet Tribal lands in Montana have also contributed to understanding the behavior, ecology and habitat of swift fox.

“I commend the efforts led by the states and other partners to address the status of the swift fox,” said Ralph Morgenweck, the service’s director of the Mountain-Prairie Region. “When new data are provided and when circumstances change due to the strenuous efforts of concerned management agencies, the Service takes these factors into consideration in the continuing evaluations required for candidate species.”

The primary focus of the Conservation Team has been to document swift fox distribution through the historic range. In addition, the team has worked with the Service to develop and implement a conservation strategy for swift fox.

“Moving forward, our efforts in Wyoming will concentrate on monitoring existing populations and identifying any potential problems that may develop so early intervention will be effective,” said Bob Oakleaf, nongame coordinator for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. “Our goal continues to be the long-term viability of the species.”

The G&F contracted the University of Wyoming’s Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to conduct swift fox surveys in much of the state’s suspected habitat of eastern Wyoming. The surveys discovered the house cat-sized animal in several areas where it had not been previously documented.

“Neither the service nor the states want to see species placed on the endangered species list; each new listing represents a wildlife conservation failure,” said Morgenweck. “The challenge now is to continue working together, get ahead of the curve, identify species in trouble, and put ecosystems in working order before the situation leads to an endangered species listing.”

The smallest of the canids, the swift fox is only found in the Great Plains of North America. Historically, the species was distributed from southern Canada to the panhandle of Texas, and from northwest Montana to western Minnesota. The disappearance of native prairies,

accidental trapping, shooting, and poisoning campaigns aimed at wolves and coyotes, contributed to the decline in the fox's habitat and numbers.