

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
REGARDING THE REMOVAL OF THE FLUVIAL ARCTIC GRAYLING
OF THE UPPER MISSOURI RIVER
AS A CANDIDATE SPECIES**

Why is the fluvial Arctic grayling of the Upper Missouri River being removed as a candidate species?

The Service has determined that listing this population of the Arctic grayling under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is not warranted because it does not constitute a distinct population segment as defined by the ESA and is therefore not a listable entity.

What is a candidate species?

A candidate species is broadly defined as a plant or animal whose status is of concern but more information is needed before it can be proposed for listing.

What is a distinct population segment (DPS)?

A distinct population segment is a portion of a vertebrate species or subspecies that is geographically discrete from the rest of its taxon and is significant to the survival of the taxon.

Discreteness refers to the isolation of a population from other members of the species and is evaluated based on specific criteria. If the population is determined to be discrete, the Service evaluates its significance based on available scientific information to determine its importance to the taxon to which it belongs. If the population is determined to be discrete and significant, the Service evaluates it for endangered or threatened status based on ESA standards.

Why doesn't the fluvial Arctic grayling of the Upper Missouri River qualify as a DPS?

The Service believes this population of Arctic grayling is discrete from other populations of the same taxon based on physical and behavioral factors. However, currently available genetic information indicates this population does not differ markedly in its genetic characteristics from adfluvial (lake and reservoir dwelling) Arctic grayling native to the Missouri River system. The fluvial Arctic grayling, therefore, should not be considered biologically or ecologically significant based simply on genetic characteristics.

The Service's 2005 candidate assessment asserted that the loss of the fluvial Arctic grayling of the upper Missouri River would result in a significant gap in the range of the taxon because these fish are the only existing fluvial grayling population in the contiguous United States and represent the southernmost extent of the species. However, a federal court recently ruled in an unrelated case that in designating a DPS, the Service must find

that a discrete population is significant to the taxon as a whole, not to the United States. Therefore, the Service has determined, based on current available information, the loss of the Montana population of fluvial Arctic grayling would not result in a significant gap in the range of the species.

Because the Service is unable to conclude at this time that the fluvial Arctic grayling population of the upper Missouri River is significant, it does not qualify as a DPS and is not a listable entity under the ESA.

What is the range of the Arctic grayling?

Arctic grayling are native to drainages of the Arctic Ocean, Hudson Bay and northern Pacific Ocean in North America and Asia. Two distinct populations historically inhabited waters in Michigan and Montana.

Fluvial (river dwelling) Arctic grayling reside in the Big Hole River and lower reaches of connected tributaries. Adfluvial (lake and reservoir dwelling) Arctic grayling are native to the upper Missouri River system known as the Red Rock Lakes (in the upper reaches of the Beaverhead River within the Centennial Valley).

What is being done to conserve the fluvial Arctic grayling of the Upper Missouri River drainage?

The Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks, in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is working with local landowners under a Candidate Conservation Agreement to protect and enhance Arctic grayling populations.

The purpose of the Agreement is to encourage non-Federal landowners to voluntarily implement proactive conservation measures that benefit grayling in the Big Hole River Project Area in Beaverhead and Deer Lodge Counties, Montana. Under the Agreement, local landowners agree to protect and enhance Arctic grayling populations by implementing conservation measures such as increasing instream flows, conserving or restoring riparian habitats, removing or mitigating for any man-made barriers to migration, and reducing threats from entrainment in irrigation ditches.

The Fluvial Arctic Grayling Workgroup established in the 1980s has been coordinating grayling conservation efforts in Montana. Since 1995, State and Federal agencies have participated in a Fluvial Arctic Grayling Restoration Plan to conserve the remaining fluvial grayling population in the Big Hole River and re-establish four additional populations. The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has been actively implementing restoration projects in the Big Hole River watershed for over a decade. The Big Hole River Foundation, Big Hole Watershed Committee, and Trout Unlimited are also participating in ongoing efforts to protect and enhance grayling habitat and the remaining population in the Big Hole River area.

The Service continues to encourage cooperative conservation and restoration of fluvial Arctic grayling in the upper Missouri River.

Since the fluvial Arctic Grayling of the Upper Missouri River will no longer be a candidate species, will the Candidate Conservation Agreement remain in effect?

Yes, the Candidate Conservation Agreement will remain in effect. Candidate Conservation Agreements may include species that have been proposed for listing or are candidates for listing or may become candidates in the future.

The Service expects all ongoing conservations to continue.

What factors affect the fluvial Arctic grayling of the Upper Missouri River?

The Arctic grayling in the Upper Big Hole River has been impacted by recent drought conditions and ongoing habitat degradation. The state of Montana considers this fish a “species of special concern”.