

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**

**Mountain-Prairie Region**

**134 Union Boulevard**

**Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

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### **Critical Habitat Designated for the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a final rule designating approximately 1,933 acres of land in Lancaster and Saunders Counties, Nebraska, as critical habitat for the endangered Salt Creek tiger beetle.

The four areas designated as critical habitat are: (1) Upper Little Salt Creek North in Lancaster County, (2) Little Salt Creek – Arbor Lake in Lancaster County, (3) Little Salt Creek – Roper in Lancaster County, and (4) Rock Creek – Jack Sinn Wildlife Management Area in Lancaster and Saunders Counties.

Critical habitat is a term defined in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection.

Saline wetland and stream complexes found along Little Salt Creek and Rock Creek comprise the critical habitat designation.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle has one of the most restricted ranges of any insect in the United States and the habitat currently occupied is highly limited and isolated. Low population numbers and the limited number of populations, as well as the close proximity of the populations, greatly increase the risk of extinction of the Salt Creek tiger beetle due to a single human or natural occurrence. Therefore, in addition to the currently occupied areas on Little Salt Creek, the Service has designated currently unoccupied habitat on Rock Creek. This is an area where a beetle population can be reintroduced and where it would have the best opportunity to survive and grow.

The Service originally proposed approximately 1,795 acres of habitat and subsequently, based on public comments received, added another 138 acres which were determined to be occupied and essential to the Salt Creek tiger beetle for a total of approximately 1,933 acres.

When considering lands for critical habitat designation, the Service focused on areas that contained moist, barren salt flats; a natural hydrologic regime resulting in annual high flows in saline streams in the early spring and summer; non-vegetated streambanks and mid-channel areas; and the presence of abundant and diverse flying and non-flying invertebrate prey species.

Considered one of the rarest insects in the United States, the Salt Creek tiger beetle was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in October 2005. Loss of saline wetland and stream habitats and changes in watershed-level hydrology were the main causes for the decline of the beetle. Since the late 1800s, more than 90 percent of the wetlands have been lost to development and modifications to hydrology. There are three populations of the beetle located along Little Salt Creek in Nebraska: the Arbor Lake, Roper, and Upper Little Salt Creek-North populations.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle is considered a “bio-indicator” species. Its presence signals the existence of a healthy saline wetland and stream system. Intact, these systems provide numerous benefits for people as well as wildlife, including water purification, flood control, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The beetle is metallic brown to dark-olive green with a metallic dark green underside. It measures about 0.5 inch in total length, and is native to eastern Nebraska’s saline wetlands. Tiger beetles are active, ground-dwelling, predatory insects that capture smaller or similar-sized arthropods in a “tiger-like” manner, grasping prey with their mandibles or mouthparts. Because of their interesting behavior and variety of forms and habitats, tiger beetles as a group have been extensively studied.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about the Salt Creek tiger Beetle is available on the Service’s web site at: <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/invertebrates/saltcreektiger/index.htm>.

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. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).