

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

SERVICE PROPOSES PROTECTION OF THE SALT CREEK TIGER BEETLE

For Immediate Release
February 1, 2005

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed listing the Salt Creek tiger beetle as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The only three known populations of these species in the world occur in saline wetlands in eastern Nebraska. The beetles are considered the rarest insect in Nebraska and are already protected under Nebraska State law.

“If the Salt Creek tiger beetle is listed under the Endangered Species Act, the Service will work cooperatively with partners to conserve their habitat,” said Ralph Morgenweck, director of the Service’s Mountain-Prairie Region.

In response to a lawsuit filed by Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund and several other plaintiffs, the Service agreed on October 7, 2002 to submit a final listing determination for the beetle to the *Federal Register* by September 30, 2005.

The Service requests that the public forward any additional comments or data about the species to the Nebraska Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 203 West Second Street, Federal Building, Second Floor, Grand Island, Nebraska 68801. The electronic mail address is fw6_sctbeetle@fws.gov. Comments and data will be accepted for 60 days after the February 1, 2005, publication in the *Federal Register*.

The Service’s proposal states that surveys from 1991 to 2004 show declines in population size and distribution. The surveys indicate that the number of remaining Salt Creek tiger beetle populations has fallen by half – from six to three populations – since 1991. The 2004 surveys revealed that the Salt Creek tiger beetle numbers fewer than 600 individuals.

The remaining populations of Salt Creek tiger beetles are believed to be threatened by:

- habitat loss and degradation due to development in northern Lancaster County and Lincoln, Nebraska.
- increased freshwater runoff and sediment from urban areas – which lowers the salt content in the water and encourages vegetative encroachment.
- bank sloughing from incised streams that were channeled.
- the effects of bank stabilization projects.
- pollution.
- pesticide application or runoff, and
- habitat loss and degradation due to grazing and cultivation.

Habitats now occupied by the beetle are small and in close proximity to each other, making it difficult to re-colonize areas that were previously occupied. The beetle is also more prone to extinction from catastrophic environmental events such as floods and drought, predation and parasites.

Extensive wetland losses have occurred in and around the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, due to urban expansion, agricultural activities, and channelization of Salt Creek. As a result, a large percentage of the Salt Creek tiger beetle's habitat has been lost. Most of the remaining saline wetlands are degraded. Only 122 acres of the barren salt flat and saline stream edge habitat of the Salt Creek tiger beetle remain in the eastern Nebraska Saline Wetland Complex, of which merely 15 acres can be considered "not highly degraded." These remaining 15 acres are believed to provide suitable habitat for the three remaining populations of Salt Creek tiger beetles.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle is considered a "bio-indicator" species. Its presence signals the existence of a healthy saline wetland, and it serves as an important link in a complex food chain of the saline wetland ecosystem. A healthy saline wetland provides numerous benefits for people, including water purification and flood control.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle is a metallic brown to dark olive green beetle with a metallic dark green underside. It measures about 0.5-inch in total length, and is native to eastern Nebraska's saline wetlands and the associated streams in the northern third of Lancaster and south-central edge of Saunders counties. It occurs in exposed mud flats of saline wetlands and along mud banks of streams and seeps.

More than 100 species and many subspecies of tiger beetles occur in the United States. There are 32 species and subspecies of tiger beetle in Nebraska alone, including the Salt Creek tiger beetle. Tiger beetles are active, ground-dwelling, predatory insects that capture smaller or similar-sized arthropods in a "tiger-like" manner. They do this by 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.

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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