

Peer Review Plan: DRAFT AMENDMENT TO THE RECOVERY PLAN FOR *RANUNCULUS ACRIFORMIS* VAR. *AESTIVALIS* (*RANUCULUS AESTIVALIS*) (AUTUMN BUTTERCUP)

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated):

Draft documents to be disseminated: April 2019

Peer review to be initiated: April 2019

Peer review to be completed by: May 2019

Final Recovery criteria expected: The Draft Amendment to the Recovery Plan is being completed to fulfill the Agency Priority Performance Goals (APGs). This goal requires that 100% of all Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recovery plans will have quantitative criteria for what constitutes a recovered species by September 30, 2019.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994, peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our draft amendment to the recovery Plan for the Autumn buttercup.

The Service will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria.

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with Autumn buttercup or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, openminded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to

the Draft Recovery Plan Amendment for Autumn buttercup. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts. The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the recovery plan amendment, and a list of citations as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the recovery planning process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of each species' needs, biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution accurate?
2. Does the recovery plan amendment provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the scientific information pertaining to these species?
3. Are our assumptions and definitions of suitable habitat logical and adequate?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in our recovery plan amendment?
5. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
6. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations. A Final Recovery Plan Amendment under the Endangered Species Act is expected by September 2019.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by May 3, 2019, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan throughout the recovery planning process. A 30-day public comment period for the Draft Recovery Plan Amendment will begin when the Notice of Availability publishes in the Federal Register. During this period, the public will have the opportunity to review and provide input to the Draft Recovery Plan Amendment. The Service will also implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process, and the Draft Recovery

Plan Amendment will be posted on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service websites with solicitations for public comment. The Draft Recovery Plan Amendment will satisfy the APGs under the Endangered Species Act. This Final Recovery Plan Amendment for the Autumn buttercup is expected by September 2019.

Contact

For more information, contact Alex Kasdin, at 303-236-4419.