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# News Release



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **SERVICE DETERMINES PYGMY RABBIT DOES NOT WARRANT PROTECTION UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will announce tomorrow, it has completed a status review, or 12-month finding, of the pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) and concluded it does not warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. The status review was undertaken after the Service determined that a petition to list the pygmy rabbit under the ESA presented substantial information in January 2008, and that listing of the species may be warranted.

“Based on a review of the best scientific and commercial information available, we find there has been some loss and degradation of pygmy rabbit habitat range wide, but not to the magnitude that constitutes a significant threat to the species,” said Bob Williams, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Nevada State Supervisor. “The comparison of available historical and current data indicates that pygmy rabbits seem to occur in a similar distribution pattern, and they have been documented as occurring in new locations. We ask that any new information concerning the status of species or threats to it be submitted to us, at any time, to assist in monitoring the species and conservation efforts.”

On May 20, 2005, the Service published a non-substantial 90-day finding in response to an April 1, 2003, petition to list the pygmy rabbit because the Service determined the petition did not contain substantial information indicating that listing of the pygmy rabbit may be warranted. On September 26, 2007, the United States District Court for the District of Idaho issued a judgment and memorandum order in response to a March 28, 2006, complaint stating the Service improperly imposed a higher standard when it reviewed the petition. The court remanded the Service’s May 20, 2005, 90-day finding and a subsequent substantial 90-day finding was issued on January 8, 2008, initiating the review of the species.

Petitioners cited several reasons why the pygmy rabbit should be protected under the ESA including:

- The pygmy rabbit has been subject to population losses and declines due to loss or modification of sagebrush habitat from many different practices and events including conversion of sagebrush habitat for agricultural purposes, livestock grazing, urban and rural development, energy development, invasive plant species, and fires;

- Pygmy rabbit populations could be harmed due to hunting mortality and research activities;
- Disease and predation likely pose serious threats to pygmy rabbit populations due to the altered sagebrush habitat throughout its range;
- State and Federal agencies have failed to protect the pygmy rabbit and its habitat in a significant portion of its range due to the inadequacies of existing regulatory mechanisms; and
- Pygmy rabbit populations have been impacted by other threats such as inter- and intra-specific competition, stochastic events, collisions with vehicles, and recreational activities.

Based on the review of the available information, the Service concluded the information does not indicate pygmy rabbits are significantly impacted by sagebrush loss or modification from various actions, hunting, research activities, predation, disease, or inadequacies of existing regulatory mechanisms across its range. Additionally, the Service finds the available information does not indicate other potential threats such as inter- and intra-specific competition, stochastic events, mortality caused by collisions with vehicles, recreational activities, and habitat modification due to climate change significantly impact the species. Therefore, the Service concludes that listing of the pygmy rabbit is not warranted at this time.

The pygmy rabbit is the smallest North American rabbit. Adult weights range from about 0.5 to 1 pound and they are between about 9 to 12 inches in length. Pygmy rabbits are typically found in areas of tall, dense sagebrush cover where soils are sufficiently deep and loose to allow burrowing. They are not distributed continuously across their range. The pygmy rabbit's historical range is in portions of the following states: California, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Washington. On March 5, 2003, the Columbia Basin Distinct Population Segment of the pygmy rabbit located in eastern Washington was listed as endangered.

A copy of the 12-month finding and other information about the pygmy rabbit is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada> or at <http://www.regulations.gov>. For further information about the pygmy rabbit and this finding contact: Robert D. Williams, State Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office by mail at 1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234, Reno, NV, by telephone (775-861-6300), or by facsimile (775-861-6301). Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

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).

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