

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## RECOVERY EFFORTS UNDERWAY FOR TWO CALIFORNIA ENDANGERED SPECIES

The declining fortunes of two California endangered species that occupy distinctly different habitats--an aridity-loving lizard and a stream-dwelling fish--are linked by the common denominator of man's continuous alteration of habitat.

The two species, the blunt-nosed leopard lizard and the unarmored threespine stickleback, became objects of recovery programs today by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The teams will prepare detailed recovery plans containing step-by-step outlines of the problems facing the species and recommend solutions to them.

"It's the same old story," Greenwalt said. "The plight of these two species is typical of dozens of others that now teeter on the brink of extinction. Every species of animal and plant survives in its native habitat through delicate adjustments to the vegetation, water, soil, and other creatures sharing the space. When deserts are artificially watered or streams pumped dry, the effect on the natural community in each place can be disastrous.

"We hope the information we learn will enable us to ensure not only the survival of the species themselves, but also the entire natural community in which they live, and, at the same time, enable the pressing human needs for resources and space to be satisfied."

(over)

The leopard lizard, named for the pattern of dark spots and white crossbars running down its back, was once abundant throughout the San Joaquin Valley and surrounding foothills. It is adapted to survival in the hot, dry grasslands, scrubs, alkali flats, and canyon floors of this area. Irrigation, agriculture, and the steady expansion of the valley's human population transformed much of the lizard's original habitat into cotton fields and orchards and pushed it into increasingly isolated areas on the fringes of the valley.

The unarmored threespined stickleback, a southern California race of the widely distributed stickleback group, has suffered a similar fate. This 3-inch fish, named for the sharp defensive spines on its back, originally inhabited several rivers in the Los Angeles plain as well as the Santa Clara River to the north. It prefers pools and riffles with moderate current and abundant rooted vegetation.

In the early 20th century, intensive use and modification of the streams in the plain, primarily withdrawal of water for irrigation, steadily reduced the water level during the hottest months. The lowered water level, coupled with the sprawling growth of Los Angeles, eliminated the fish throughout the metropolitan area. Grazing and timber cutting removed natural plant cover from the hillsides and greatly increased the runoff of gill-choking silt into the streams. This has further degraded the remaining habitat of the species.

Recently two new menaces have been added to the list of problems facing the stickleback. African clawed frogs, voracious pests capable of devouring every stickleback coming near them, were recently found in the stickleback's last refuge in the upper Santa Clara. Although all of the frogs were removed, biologists fear that the problem may reoccur since the frogs are already widely distributed in medical research laboratories and home aquariums. Another unwelcome arrival, from the fish's point of view, are the trail bikes which have invaded Soledad Canyon. The bikes tear up vegetation and soil of the streambank, further increasing the runoff of silt into the water.

The members of the recovery teams have been chosen to provide expertise in dealing with the two species. They represent all agencies, State and Federal, which have an interest in saving them.

Members of the leopard lizard team are:

John Brode, California Department of Fish and Game, Team Leader  
Tom Charmley, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Dennis Johnson, Bureau of Land Management  
Gregg Berry, Bureau of Land Management  
Randy Long, U.S. Forest Service  
Dan Christenson, California Department of Fish and Game

Members of the stickleback team are:

Shoken Sasaki, California Department of Fish and Game, Team Leader  
Calvin Albright, California Department of Fish and Game  
Dr. Jonathon Baskin, California State Polytechnic University  
Dr. Camm Swift, Los Angeles County Natural History Museum  
James St. Amant, California Department of Fish and Game  
Ben Beall, U.S. Forest Service

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