

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release February 1, 1978

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## LEOPARD DARTER FISH DETERMINED THREATENED IN PARTS OF OKLAHOMA AND ARKANSAS

After a thorough review and consideration of all the information available, the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the leopard darter (Percina pantherina), a small fish in western Arkansas and southeastern Oklahoma, is a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Critical habitat for this darter is described in the January 27, 1978, issue of the Federal Register.

"Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened" means that a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a portion of its range.

The darter is considered threatened due to the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range. Historically, the leopard darter was found throughout most of the upland large stream habitats of the Little River drainage of Arkansas and Oklahoma. The habitat is typically clear, swift shoal areas in moderate to large streams. In these streams it is most frequently found in gravel areas with some sand intermixed. It also occurs along the borders of stream channels.

In the past, several of man's activities have resulted in the destruction or modification of habitat of the leopard darter. One of the most important factors which has resulted in most habitat destruction has been the impoundments constructed in the Little River drainage. Other factors responsible for habitat alteration to a lesser extent include siltation from agricultural operations, commercial gravel operations, industrial and municipal effluents, and road construction. Both impoundment and pollution presently represent serious threats to the leopard darter.

From its once widespread range in the Little River drainage of Oklahoma and Arkansas, the alteration of its habitat through impoundment and pollution has greatly reduced its distribution and numbers. The present known distribution is a portion of the Little River above Pine Creek Reservoir, Glover Creek, and Mountain Fork above Broken Bow Reservoir. Additionally, in a recent survey of the Cossatot River fishes, the leopard darter was found at three localities. Two of these localities are below the recently completed Gillham Dam on the Cossatot River and should not be considered as supporting viable populations because upstream impoundments usually result in the loss of populations occurring downstream.

The data presently available indicate that the leopard darter population in Glover Creek is relatively strong and viable and thus the species is being proposed as threatened rather than endangered. Glover Creek in its present state has good water quality and offers good habitat for the leopard darter and numerous other stream-dwelling organisms. The proposed

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Lukfata Reservoir impoundment and subsequent alterations of Glover Creek, however, would drastically change the situation and seriously reduce the leopard darter population in this creek.

Protection of the leopard darter from the proposed impoundment will also help protect two proposed endangered plants, the small-headed pipewort and prairie jewelflower, and the endangered red cockcaded woodpecker.

The Director has considered all comments and data submitted in response to the proposed determination of critical habitat for the leopard darter. Based on this review the critical habitat for the leopard darter is determined to include the following streams:

Little River and Black Fork Creek--Oklahoma, Pushmataha County. Main channel of Little River from mouth of Cloudy Creek upstream to the Pushmataha-LeFlore County line. Main channel of Black Fork Creek from its junction with Little River upstream to Oklahoma Highway 144.

Glover Creek, East Fork Glover Creek, and West Fork Glover Creek--Oklahoma, McCurtain County. Main channel of Glover Creek from Oklahoma Highway 7 crossing upstream to the junction of the East Fork and West Fork of Glover Creek. Main channel of the East Fork of Glover Creek from its junction with the West Fork of Glover Creek upstream to 4 air miles NNE of the community of Bethel. The main channel of the West Fork of Glover Creek from its junction with the East Fork of Glover Creek upstream to the community of Battiest.

Mountain Fork Creek--Oklahoma, McCurtain County. Main channel of Mountain Fork Creek from 6 air miles SSW of Smithville at the mouth of Boktukola Creek upstream to the Oklahoma-Arkansas State line.

Mountain Fork Creek--Arkansas, Polk County. Main channel of Mountain Fork Creek from the Oklahoma-Arkansas State line upstream to the community of Mountain Fork.

The areas delineated above do not include all known localities for the leopard darter. Several localities in smaller tributaries to the Little River, Glover Creek, and Mountain Fork Creek are not included at this time. Based on an examination of the distributional data presently available, the leopard darter appears to be an inhabitant of the main channels of the largest streams with individuals occasionally entering the lower portions of large tributaries. The portion of the Cossatot River inhabited by the leopard darter is not included since the alterations brought about by Gillham Dam and Reservoir will, in all probability, result in the elimination of the species in that system.

The determination set forth in these rules and the designation of critical habitat make the leopard darter eligible for the consideration provided by Section 7 of the Act which obliges all other Federal agencies to ensure that their actions do not infringe on the needs of the fish. The Director has prepared, in consultation with Federal agencies, guidelines for Federal agencies for the application of Section 7 of the Act.