

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE NEWS BRIEFS

Coachella Valley (CA) Fringe-Toed Lizard Listed As Threatened. The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, found only on windblown sand deposits in the valley for which it's named near Palm Springs, California, has been declared a "threatened" species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The action follows a similar protective move by the State in June.

One of the most completely sand-adapted creatures in the world, the fringe-toed lizard has been losing its specialized habitat at an increasing rate to expanding urban and agricultural development of the desert. It is now restricted to less than half its former range in the windblown sand deposits that occur in a mosaic pattern of sandy plains, hummocks, and dunes across the Coachella Valley in Riverside County. In listing it as a threatened species, the Interior Department agency noted that the lizard could face the possibility of extinction in the future (i.e., could warrant the more serious status of "endangered"), if projected development continues without adequate conservation measures for the species.

These conservation measures, including cooperative management and protection and special grants to the State, now can get under way. Other measures will include appointment of a team of experts to study the lizard and develop a plan for its long-range recovery, and biological guidance to Federal agencies to assist in designing projects that are compatible both with project aims and conservation of the species. In the vast majority of cases in the past where a potential conflict between a project and an endangered species has seemed likely, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been able to suggest modifications that have allowed a project to proceed without harm to the species or its supporting habitat.

The most essential portion -- about 18 square miles -- of the lizard's remaining range has been designated as its "critical habitat" -- the area containing the necessary elements, including a sand source, for its continued survival. Designation of the area as a critical habitat does not affect the ownership or status of the land, other than serving as a caution to Federal agencies that the area requires special conservation considerations when those agencies are funding or authorizing projects that may affect it.

The final rule listing the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard as threatened and designating its critical habitat was published in the September 25, 1980, Federal Register.

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African Antelope, the Red Lechwe, Reclassified. The red lechwe, an African antelope, is no longer in danger of extinction and has been reclassified under the Endangered Species Act from "endangered" status to the less grave "threatened" category, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The change in status was published as a final rule in the October 1, 1980, Federal Register.

The change will allow the animal to be imported as a sport trophy and for other noncommercial purposes without a Federal permit, so long as the importation complies with terms of a 59-nation treaty, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The red lechwe is listed in

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Appendix II of the treaty, a category that requires an export permit from the country of origin certifying that the purpose of the export permit will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

The status review conducted by the Service found that lechwe populations, now estimated at about 150,000, are stable or increasing in their native countries of South West Africa, Botswana, Angola, Zambia, and Zaire, where they are protected by national laws as well as the international treaty. Although the species is no longer in danger of extinction, it is still threatened by illegal hunting and loss of habitat from development. The status review was based on information provided by the Safari Club International, which had petitioned to have the lechwe reclassified, and by the Republic of Botswana.

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Comment Period Extended on Currituck Outer Banks Proposal. The public will have additional time to comment on a proposal to establish a national wildlife refuge on the Currituck Outer Banks of North Carolina, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Lynn A. Greenwalt has announced.

Greenwalt said he would consider all comments received through November 14 before acting on the proposal to acquire lands north of Corolla to the Virginia State line and the wetlands south of the village to the Dare County line. The final environmental impact statement analyzing the proposal and other alternatives was released by the Service's Northeast Regional Office September 12.

Comments should be addressed to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (RE), Washington, D.C. 20240.

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Public Hearings Rescheduled on C.M. Russell Refuge EIS. Public hearings have been rescheduled on the draft environmental impact statement on management alternatives for the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in Montana. New dates for the hearings are: Missoula, MT: October 28, 7:00 p.m., Village Red Lion Motor Inn; Lewistown, MT: October 29, 7:00 p.m., Civic Center; Glasgow, MT: October 30, 7:00 p.m., Civic Center; Washington, D.C.: November 3, 10:00 a.m., Auditorium Main Interior Building. Comments will be accepted through December 5 and should be sent to the Area Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Room 3035, Federal Building, 316 North 26th Avenue, Billings, Montana 59101.

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