

## **Massachusetts Population of the Northern Red-bellied Cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) Peer Review Plan**

### **About the Document**

By the end of fiscal year 2021, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will make a 5-year review recommendation whether to retain the northern red-bellied cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*) as endangered, downlist it to threatened, or delist it on the basis of recovery. A draft species status assessment (SSA) is underway, and the results of the SSA will inform the 5-year review.

### **About the Peer Review Process**

#### **Estimated Peer Review Timeline: June to July 2021**

#### **Process:**

- Per our 1994 Peer Review policy, we will choose three or more independent peer reviewers and invite comment letters from the peer reviewers.
- Peer reviewers will be requested to review the draft SSA for the Massachusetts population of the Northern red-bellied cooter that will inform the 5-year review.
- Peer reviewers will not be asked to provide recommendations on the species' listing status, potential delisting criteria, or recovery actions. Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document.
- Peer reviewers will be asked to fill out a Conflict of Interest Form.

Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** Reviewers will be experts in the ecology of the Northern red-bellied cooter or similar taxa, the stressors affecting this species, or applicable fields.
- **Independence:** As a rule, reviewers will not be employed by the Service, unless the Service staff is a leading expert in the ecology or stressors of the species, or an applicable field, and has not been involved in the report. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service, as appropriate.

- **Objectivity:** Reviewers are expected to be objective, open-minded, and thoughtful.
- **Advocacy:** Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Reviewers will not have any financial or other interest that conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.

### **About Public Participation**

- The Service will post a summary of the results of the peer review process.
- This peer review plan is made available on this website to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.
- If the Service proposes reclassification of this species, a public comment period will begin when the Notice of Availability publishes in the Federal Register.

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