

Peaks of Otter Salamander (*Plethodon hubrichti*) Peer Review Plan

About the Document

By the end of fiscal year 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will make a listing determination on a petition to list the Peaks of Otter salamander (*Plethodon hubrichti*). A listing determination means to prepare either a not warranted 12-month petition finding or a proposed rule to list the Peaks of Otter salamander as a threatened or an endangered species. A proposed listing rule would also include a proposed designation of critical habitat, if prudent and determinable. If the Service proposes to list the Peaks of Otter salamander, a final listing determination would follow within the statutory timelines.

About the Peer Review Process

Estimated Peer Review Timeline: September 2018 to October 2018

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 Species Status Assessment Report for the Peaks of Otter salamander that supports our listing determination.
- Peer reviewers will not be asked to provide recommendations on the listing determination or designation of critical habitat. 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 Peaks of Otter salamander, 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 or proposed rule compilation. 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

- Our listing decision document will be made available to the public through the eRulemaking website, news releases, direct mailings, and posting on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment if we prepare a proposed rule to list the species as threatened or endangered). If appropriate, the Service will implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final listing and designation of critical habitat (if prudent and determinable), following consideration of all comments received from the public and peer reviewers.
- The Service will post a notice on its website of the final decision, which will include 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.

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