

Press Release

## **Endangered Status Proposed for Rare Shrimp-Like Amphipod in D.C., Maryland, Virginia**

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Most underground amphipods are eyeless, colorless and about the size of your pinky fingernail. Unflattering characteristics aside, their presence packs a punch: amphipods are vulnerable to water quality and are important parts of a healthy food web. One amphipod, found only in the Washington metropolitan area and Caroline County, Virginia, could soon find itself on the federal endangered species list.

In proposing endangered status for the Kenk's amphipod today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service outlines a potentially grim future for the shrimp-like crustacean, threatened by poor water quality, degraded natural spring habitat and small populations.

Dr. Roman Kenk, while surveying the National Park Service's Rock Creek Park in 1967, first discovered the amphipod hidden in leaves and fine soil where underground springs surface. The park shelters some of the metropolitan area's last remaining, unpaved and unfilled natural springs. The springs are homes to salamanders, insects and crustaceans that are food resources for other animals, and groundwater that helps plants thrive.

Since that time, the amphipod's story has been mixed: it has disappeared from many natural areas where it was once found, yet it has also recently been discovered in a new area 60 miles away. The amphipod's current distribution includes six sites in D.C. and Maryland and four sites discovered this year on the Army's Fort A.P. Hill in Caroline County, Virginia. Multiple surveys over the past few years have failed to find the amphipod at five of the six northern sites.

Found almost entirely on park or federal lands, the amphipod's sensitivity to water quality makes its presence an indication of cleaner water. While many of the northern springs are in protected areas, activities occurring outside park boundaries could be affecting the groundwater. Toxic spills, sewer leaks, and pollution can alter water quality, and disturbing or converting land to roads or pavement, as well as the frequency of rain, can affect the amount or level of water. At Fort A.P. Hill, the Army maintains the basins supplying the springs, avoiding potential water quality issues.

Areas between D.C. and Caroline County, Virginia, have already been surveyed for other amphipods, but given the recent Fort A.P. Hill discovery, the Service will fund additional surveys to detect whether Kenk's amphipod could be present.

The Service has worked closely with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the District of Columbia Department of the Environment, and the National Park Service to preserve quality spring

habitat. The District of Columbia was recently awarded a grant to slow down, cool off, clean and infiltrate polluted stormwater within an 11-acre site of Rock Creek Park.

The Service invites peer review and public comment for 60 days on the [proposed rule](#) at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under docket #FWS-R5-ES-2016-0030. The proposed rule explains the primary threats to the amphipod's long-term viability and describes what additional information would help the final decision, such as specifics on habitat hydrology, competition with other amphipods, and refined methods for estimating population size. Following the comment period, the Service will make a final decision to list the amphipod as endangered or threatened, or to withdraw the proposal. The species is already protected by state law in Maryland.

The proposed listing does not alter the Service's 2014-2015 analysis of the Purple Line project, which determined the project would have no effect on the Kenk's amphipod. It also fulfills the agency's obligation under a 2013 settlement agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity.

For the past 40 years, the ESA has been successful in preventing the extinction of more than 99 percent of listed species. In addition to providing regulatory protections, listing under the ESA raises awareness about the need for coordinating conservation efforts, enhancing research programs and developing measures to help recover listed species.

For more information, visit: <https://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/>.

#### **How You Can Help Water Quality:**

- Dispose of trash properly, and do not dump products into stormwater drains.
- Consider maintaining your lawn without the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- Report illegal dumping and discharges to community leaders.
- Plant native or rain gardens to help reduce stormwater runoff.