

# News Release



Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office  
2600 SE 98<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 100, Portland, Oregon 97266  
Phone: 503-231-6179 Fax: 503-231-6195  
<http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/>

October 12, 2011

11-160

Contact: Janet Lebson 503-231-6179  
[janet\\_lebson@fws.gov](mailto:janet_lebson@fws.gov)

## **Red Tree Vole Population to be Designated a Candidate for Endangered Species Act Protection**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today that the North Oregon Coast population of the red tree vole — a small, coniferous forest-dwelling rodent — is a genetically distinct population that warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, listing it at this time is precluded by higher priority listing actions.

The range of the North Oregon Coast population encompasses the Oregon Coast Range from the Siuslaw River north to the Columbia River, in all of Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Lincoln Counties and the western portions of Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill, Polk, Benton, Lane and Douglas Counties. More than 60 percent of the area is privately owned, about 16 percent is state-owned land and 22 percent is federal land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

“As a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection, this red tree vole population will benefit from our proactive conservation efforts with partners and citizens, and those measures may help deter a future listing,” said Paul Henson, State Supervisor of the Service’s Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office.

Loss of habitat and the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms to protect the red tree vole and its habitat (two of five factors used to evaluate whether a species should be listed) were identified as key threats to the species. Other threats include isolation of populations and potential loss of populations due to random large-scale disturbance to habitat, such as wildfire. Tree voles literally spend their lives in trees and have low mobility and poor dispersal capability, making it difficult for them to recover from habitat loss and remain connected to other vole communities if their habitat becomes fragmented.

Today’s decision is in response to a June 22, 2007 petition requesting federal protection for one of three possible entities: 1) the dusky tree vole subspecies of the red tree vole; 2) the North Oregon Coast “distinct population segment” of the red tree vole; or 3) the red tree vole under the reasoning that it is endangered or threatened in a significant portion of its range. In October 2008, the Service determined that listing one of the three entities may be warranted. The agency then initiated a more thorough review of all the biological information available, culminating in today’s determination.

The ESA provides that a species, subspecies or distinct population segment may be listed as endangered or threatened. Agency policy defines how a distinct population segment can qualify for listing, using such factors as the population segment’s discreteness and significance to the rest of the species.

In considering the possible entities described in the petition, the Service reviewed the best scientific and commercial information available and concluded that the evidence does not indicate that the dusky tree vole qualifies as a distinct subspecies. An evaluation of the North Oregon Coast population of the red tree vole led the agency to conclude it is markedly separate from the rest of the red tree vole population based on genetic differences, and represents a biologically significant component of the red tree vole species, therefore it qualifies as a distinct population segment.

When the Service is petitioned to list a species, there are several steps in the process. Generally, the first is to determine whether or not emergency listing is warranted, and if it is not, the next step is to issue a “90-day finding” on whether the petition presents substantial information that listing may be warranted. If it is considered potentially warranted (as this petition was in October 2008), the agency moves on to conduct a “status review” of the species to gather more information. The next step is a “12-month finding” which determines either that the petitioned action is warranted, that it is not warranted or that it is warranted but precluded by other higher priority listing actions (such as today’s decision), and the species becomes a “candidate” for listing in the future. The status of each candidate species is re-evaluated each year until either a listing proposal is developed or a “not warranted” finding is made based on new information.

Red tree voles are rodents that are less than 8 inches long (including their tail) and weigh almost two ounces. They are found only along the Oregon Coast, the Western Cascades of Oregon and into northwestern California. Their coat is thick, soft, and long, ranging in color from brownish red on the back to bright brownish-red or orange-red. Active at night, they spend their lives in the tops of tall Douglas fir or other conifers, building nests up to bushel-basket size and eating conifer needles. They get water from rain drops and condensation that collects on the conifer needles. Red tree voles spend most of their lives in trees and only rarely come to the ground, suggesting they have limited ability to move among isolated islands of habitat.

For more information on the red tree vole and the Service’s endangered species conservation and recovery efforts in Oregon, visit [www.fws.gov/oregonfwo](http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo).

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America’s native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

-FWS-