

News Release



Department of the Interior
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Another Fish in Oregon Swims Toward Recovery

Service proposes removing federal protection for Borax Lake chub

PORTLAND, Oregon – A solitary hot spring tucked away in the vast Southeastern Oregon desert is home to a little fish that has made a robust recovery at the hands of an enduring conservation partnership, prompting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to propose removing federal protection for the Borax Lake chub.

The Borax Lake chub exists solely in Borax Lake, a truly unique spring-fed lake located in the Alvord Basin of Harney County, Oregon. The tiny and tough fish has evolved to withstand the harsh conditions of remnant desert waters of the Great Basin, where surface water temperatures reach up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

“This proposal to delist the Borax Lake chub reflects the great work of partners and their accomplishments in reducing primary threats to the fish,” said Robyn Thorson, the Service’s Pacific Region Director. “On the heels of the proposal to delist the Foskett speckled dace and the recent delistings of Oregon chub and the Modoc sucker, this proposal adds to the progress being made toward recovering native Oregon wildlife. These recoveries exemplify the commitment and dedication of our local and state partners.”

Several decades ago, the fish’s habitat was at risk due to geothermal energy exploration, diversion of the lake’s water for irrigation, and legacy effects of salt mining. These threats lead to an emergency rule in 1980 that designated the Borax Lake chub as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Since then, conservation partners have led the effort to protect Borax Lake and its distinctive chub. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has led monitoring efforts and acquired water rights to protect lake levels, The Nature Conservancy has purchased and manages the 320 acres of land containing the lake and the surrounding area, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has designated the adjacent 600 acres as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. These efforts have supported the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposal to remove Endangered Species Act protections for the Borax Lake chub.

"Borax Lake is one of the most unique habitats in the state of Oregon," said BLM Burns District Manager Jeff Rose. "BLM is proud to have contributed to the efforts resulting in the recovery of the equally unique fish that inhabits the lake. We want to recognize the local BLM biologists and managers that worked over the

years to develop and maintain the partnerships that resulted in the delisting of this fish through appropriate management of public lands in concert with state and private organizations. BLM will continue to manage the area to ensure that it is maintained in a condition that promotes the persistence of the Borax Lake chub and the unique environment in which it resides."

Protecting and recovering the chub has helped protect a biodiverse desert ecosystem benefitting hundreds of other species. Partners will continue to work together to monitor and evaluate fish populations, lake conditions, and potential future threats to the species.

"It's great to see the hard work of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, federal natural resource agencies, and The Nature Conservancy pay off like this again, and in such a unique habitat in Oregon's High Desert," said Curt Melcher, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Director.

This announcement opens a 60-day comment period to allow the public to review and comment on the proposal to delist Borax Lake chub, and to provide additional information. We are also accepting comments on the draft post-delisting monitoring plan for Borax Lake chub. All relevant information received by April 29, 2019, will be considered.

For information on how to provide public comments, request a public hearing, or find more information on the Borax Lake chub, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/>.

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