



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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For Release: May 27, 2004
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PIEA-04-13
04-054

Comment Period Reopens on Proposed Threatened Status for the Mariana Fruit Bat

A notice was published in the Federal Register today reopening the comment period on the proposed rule to reclassify the Mariana fruit bat from endangered to threatened status on Guam, and to list the species as threatened in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be accepting comments and materials concerning the proposal until June 28.

This subspecies of the Mariana fruit bat is found throughout the Mariana Archipelago, which includes both the Territory of Guam and CNMI. In CNMI, the bat occurs primarily on private and Commonwealth lands, including inhabited and uninhabited islands. On Guam, the bat is known to roost primarily on federal lands and to forage widely throughout the island. Currently, fewer than 100 individual bats remain on Guam, and several thousand individuals are distributed among the islands of the CNMI.

The Mariana fruit bat is restricted to the Mariana Islands in the western Pacific. This medium-sized bat weighs 0.66 to 1.15 pounds. Males are slightly larger than females, and all animals have grizzled black to brown fur and a golden brown mantle.

The Mariana fruit bat was first believed to consist of two distinct populations, one in Guam, and the other in the CNMI. However, data from the best available scientific and commercial information indicates that this subspecies of fruit bat comprises a single population throughout the Mariana Archipelago. In its proposed rule, the Service states that the survival of these bats on Guam continues to be threatened by a variety of factors, and when viewed as a portion of the entire population, reclassification from endangered to threatened is appropriate and biologically justified. Service biologists believe that proposing to list the entire population of the Mariana fruit bat as threatened throughout its range (Guam and the CNMI) will retain an appropriate level of protection throughout the Mariana Islands.

The proposed rule was originally published on March 26, 1998, with a 60-day comment period that closed on May 26, 1998. Interested parties submitted comments, data, and other information pertaining to the development of the final rule. On May 29, 1998, the public comment period was reopened again until July 10, 1998. Public hearings were held on Saipan and Rota in June 1998. Under a settlement agreement approved by the U. S. District Court for the District of Hawaii on August 21, 2002, the Service must make a final decision on this proposal by December 31, 2004.

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Previous comments submitted on the March 26, 1998, proposed rule will be considered and need not be resubmitted. Additional comments and materials should be sent to the Assistant Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, HI 96850.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.