

# Facts and Q&A's about the 90-day finding on a Petition to List the Siskiyou Mountains Salamander and Scott Bar

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Prepared by the Yreka Fish and Wildlife Office

## **Background on the species:**

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander and Scott Bar salamander are completely terrestrial, medium-sized, slender-bodied salamanders with short limbs and a dorsal stripe. Both species are found in or near talus (loose surface rock) and fissured rock outcrops where moisture and humidity are high enough to allow respiration through their skin (Nussbaum *et al.* 1983). Both species are endemic to the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains of southern Oregon and northern California.

Recent research described Plethodon asupak, the Scott Bar salamander, as a new species based on analysis of molecular (mitochondrial DNA) and morphological data from Plethodon populations near the confluence of the Klamath and Scott Rivers in Siskiyou County, California. Molecular analysis shows the Scott Bar salamander to be the ancestral lineage from which the Del Norte salamander and Siskiyou Mountains salamander were derived. For the purpose of this finding, the Service is evaluating the Scott Bar salamander as a species separate from the Siskiyou Mountains salamander. We recognize, however, that genetic research on these salamanders is ongoing, and the species' designations may be reconsidered in the future.

Siskiyou Mountains salamanders and Scott Bar salamanders are found on forested slopes where rocky soils and talus outcrops occur. Occupied habitat for the Siskiyou Mountains salamander can range from small isolated rock outcrops to clear-cut and naturally open areas. Occasionally these salamanders can be found under other types of cover such as bark, limbs, or logs, but only during wet weather when moisture is high and only if there are talus outcrops nearby. Early research characterized optimal habitat for the Siskiyou Mountains salamander as stabilized talus in old-growth forest stands on north-facing slopes. However, more recent populations of both species have been found in rock outcrops in all forest age classes and on all slope aspects, as well as in managed stands. Siskiyou Mountains salamanders have been collected in the spring during the daytime at soil temperatures ranging from 38 to 52.3 degrees Fahrenheit (3.5 to 11.3 degrees Celsius) and at depths ranging from 0 to 18.0 inches (0 to 45.7 centimeters).

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander's range encompasses approximately 337,037 acres (ac) (136,500 hectares (ha)) in three counties (Jackson, Josephine, and Siskiyou) of southwestern Oregon and northern California (Clayton and Nauman 2005a). More specifically, this species has been detected in the Applegate River drainage of southern Oregon south to the Klamath River watershed of northern California. In California, recent genetic analyses suggests the species' range is bounded to the west by the Indian Creek drainage and to the east by the Horse Creek drainage (see DeGross 2004; Mahoney 2004; Mead *et al.* 2005; Mead 2006). Approximately 90 percent of the Siskiyou

Mountains salamander's range occurs on Federal lands managed under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). Within the NWFP area, 36 percent of the salamander's range occurs in reserves (Late-Successional Reserves, Administratively Withdrawn Areas, and Congressionally Reserved Areas) where timber harvest and other ground-disturbing activities are severely restricted, 10 percent is within Matrix lands generally available for timber harvest, and 44 percent occurs in Adaptive Management Areas (AMA) where habitat management guidelines are flexible and some timber harvest is expected to occur. The remaining 10 percent of the species' range occurs on private lands.

To date, approximately 200 Siskiyou Mountains salamander sites have been located. This number represents an unknown proportion of the total population, because surveys have not been conducted over the species' entire range. These localities occur primarily on Federal lands and are distributed across several NWFP land use allocations.

The Scott Bar salamander is found only in Siskiyou County, California, from just east of Seiad Valley to Scott Bar Mountain. The species' range extends north and south of the Klamath River and east and west of the Scott River and encompasses approximately 68,438 ac (27,717 ha). Approximately 82 percent of the Scott Bar salamander's range occurs on Federal lands: 58 percent in reserves (Late-Successional Reserves) and 24 percent in Matrix lands. The remaining 18 percent of the species' range occurs on private lands.

It has been reported that fewer than ten localities are currently known for the Scott Bar salamander, although other locations are suspected. Based on our internal review of recent genetic analyses, 17 Scott Bar salamander localities have now been verified. Within the presumed range of the Scott Bar salamander, numerous historical salamander detections have been assigned to the Siskiyou Mountains salamander. Because the two species tend not to overlap, it is reasonable to conclude that all salamander detections within what is now known to be the range of the Scott Bar salamander are Scott Bar salamanders.

#### **Chronology of Listing Actions:**

- On June 18, 2004, the Service received a petition to list and designate critical habitat for the above species from the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and others.
- On August 23, 2005, CBD and four other groups sued the Service for failure to publish a 90-day finding on the petition. The Service agreed to publish the 90-day finding by April 15, 2006, and the 12-month finding by January 15, 2007, if appropriate.
- In April of 2006, the Service was granted an extension to publish by April 25, 2006.

**Q. What is the process spelled out in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for evaluating petitions to list a species?**

A. The ESA requires that the Service make a finding on whether a petition to list, delist, or reclassify a species presents substantial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted. This finding is based on information contained in the petition, supporting information submitted with the petition, and information otherwise available to the Service at the time of the finding. To the maximum extent practicable, the Service makes this finding within 90 days of the receipt of the petition and publishes this 90-day finding in the Federal Register. If the Service finds that substantial information is presented, it commences a review of the status of the species which is to be completed, if feasible, within 12 months of receipt of the petition. In this 12-month finding, the Service determines whether listing is warranted.

**Q. What was in the petition?**

A. The petition claims that logging and wildfire pose threats to both species by altering the microclimate within forest habitat and fragmenting or otherwise reducing habitat quality; that the two species receive inadequate protections since the Survey and Manage Program was discontinued in 2004; and that global warming and stochastic events threaten the restricted number of Scott Bar salamander populations.

**Q. What did the Service's 90-day finding conclude?**

A. The Petitioners claims were not substantial because:

1. Both species occur to some extent in clearcuts and naturally open habitats.
2. The demography of populations subjected to timber harvest is poorly known.
3. The rate and extent of timber harvest has declined dramatically on Federal lands.
4. Habitat loss has not been quantified nor demonstrated to have impacted the species.
5. The Survey and Manage Program of the Northwest Forest Plan was reinstated in January 2006 by court order.
6. The Klamath National Forest has formally extended Survey and Manage protections to the newly described Scott Bar salamander.
7. The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is currently protected as a threatened species under the California ESA, and is afforded protection on private timberlands.
8. The Service does not have appropriate information to evaluate the risk of global warming or stochastic events.
9. A considerable amount of Scott Bar salamander habitat has yet to be surveyed, suggesting that the population may be larger than currently described.

**Q. What happens if the State of California delists the Siskiyou Mountains salamander?**

A. The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is currently listed as a threatened species in California. However, the California Department of Fish and Game has petitioned the

California Fish and Game Commission to delist the Siskiyou Mountains salamander. A decision on this delisting petition will not be made until January 31, 2007. As a general principle, the Service considers all relevant information *available at the time* it makes a decision in any action called for under its enabling legislation.

**Q. What happens now?**

A. At this point, the Service will take no further action. The Service will continue to monitor the status and management of the species and to accept additional information and comments from all concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning this finding.

**More questions? Write or call:**

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