

News Bulletin

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Pacific Islands Fish & Wildlife Office

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Service Reopens Comment Period for Critical Habitat Designation on Hawaii Island

HONOLULU, Hawaii – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is reopening a 15-day public comment period on the proposal to designate critical habitat for three plant species on Hawaii Island under the Endangered Species Act (Act). The Service is reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties further opportunity to comment on areas under consideration for exclusion from critical habitat designation in the final rule.

The proposed rule, which covered the plants kookoolau (*Bidens micrantha ctenophylla*), wahine noho kula (*Isodendron pyrifolium*), and uhiuhi (*Mezoneuron kavaiense*), was published on October 17, 2012, and has been available to the public for review and comment during several public comment periods. Comments previously submitted on the proposed rule do not need to be resubmitted, as they will be fully considered in preparation of the final rule.

The proposed critical habitat designation identified seven critical habitat units totaling approximately 18,766 acres (7,597 hectares), and includes both occupied and unoccupied habitat. In addition to the areas considered for exclusion from critical habitat in the proposed rule, the Service is considering excluding 2,925 acres based on new conservation partnerships with local groups and partners. The deadline for submitting new comments is June 6, 2016.

The proposed exclusions are based on conservation partnerships with local groups or partners, which will protect threatened and endangered species while supporting land use. These partnerships and associated conservation agreements demonstrate that threatened and endangered species can successfully coexist with the interests of private and public landowners. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special

management considerations or protection. Designating critical habitat helps focus the conservation efforts of conservation partners such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. In weighing the benefits of exclusion versus inclusion, the Service considers a number of factors, including whether a landowner has developed a habitat conservation plan or other management plan for the area, or whether there is a conservation partnership that would be encouraged by designation of, or exclusion from, critical habitat. The Service considers the establishment and encouragement of strong conservation partnerships with non-federal landowners to be especially important in the State of Hawaii, where there are relatively few lands under federal ownership.

The Service specifically requests public comments and information on the benefits of including or excluding any specific areas in the final designation and supporting rationale, and whether any specific exclusions may result in the extinction of the species and why.

Comments may be submitted by one of the following methods:

- *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for Docket No. FWS–R1–ES–2013–0028, and follow the directions for submitting a comment.
- *Hard Copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R1–ES–2013–0028; Division of Policy, Performance, and Management Programs; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; MS: BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike; Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.
- All comments will be posted on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Copies of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service’s website at www.fws.gov/pacificislands or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Honolulu office 808/792-9400.

For more information about critical habitat, visit: <http://go.usa.gov/3GTdj>

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