



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Service Proposes to Remove Hawaiian Hawk from Endangered Species List

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to remove the Hawaiian hawk from its current listing as endangered under the Endangered Species Act because the population is secure and no longer requires federal protection. The Service is seeking public comment on this proposal and at the same time, providing notice of the withdrawal of a previous proposed reclassification of the bird from endangered to threatened status. The notice, published in today's *Federal Register*, also requests the submission of any information that may be available regarding the status of this species.

"The Hawaiian hawk, or 'io, has shown great resiliency in the face of a changing landscape resulting in this proposed delisting," said Patrick Leonard, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

Due to implementation of recovery actions and other conservation efforts, the species is now found throughout the island of Hawai'i and has had a stable population for at least 20 years. It is nesting and foraging successfully in both native and altered habitats and has large areas of protected habitat. The Hawaiian hawk is not currently threatened by overutilization, disease, predation, contaminants, lack of adequate regulatory mechanisms, or other factors, and therefore no longer meets the definition of a threatened or endangered species throughout its range. Researchers estimate the total population of Hawaiian hawk to be about 3,000 birds.

The proposed rule, if made final, would remove the Hawaiian hawk from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and remove all protections provided under the Endangered Species Act. The hawk will remain protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal law that prohibits "taking" – killing, selling or otherwise harming migratory birds, their nests or eggs.

In traditional Hawaiian culture, the 'io is believed to be an "aumakua" – a family or personal god in the shape of an animal. Mortals did not harm or eat 'aumakua, and in return, the 'aumakua would warn

and reprimand mortals in their dreams, visions and calls. Also, 'io are considered a symbol of Hawaiian royalty because of their lofty flight.

The Hawaiian hawk is a small, broad-winged species of hawk endemic to the Hawaiian Islands and is the only member of the hawk family that nests and resides in the islands. The 'io was listed as endangered based on its restricted range on the island of Hawai'i, its small population size, and the loss of native forest habitat from agriculture, logging, and commercial development.

Hawaiian hawks mate for life and defend their territories year-round. Eggs are laid from March to June and the eggs hatch from May to July. The young birds fledge from July to September. A typical clutch consists of one egg. Currently, the hawk is known to breed only on the island of Hawai'i, but there have been at least eight observations of the species on the islands of Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Maui since 1978, and fossils are known from the islands of Moloka'i and Kaua'i. The current range of the hawk is estimated to encompass 2,372 square miles, comprising 58.7 percent of the island of Hawai'i.

When originally listed as endangered in 1967 under the Endangered Species Preservation Act (the precursor to the Endangered Species Act of 1973), the hawk was presumed to occupy only undisturbed, native habitat and its population was thought to be in the low hundreds. It is now known to occur in a variety of habitat types – at both high and low elevations – that include native forest, nonnative forests, pastures and agricultural lands. The 'io also uses a variety of native and nonnative prey species for food, such as rodents and large insects.

The Hawaiian hawk recovery plan, finalized in 1984, recognized the difficulty of collecting precise population estimates and comparing with historical data counts. Therefore, the objective of the recovery plan was to maintain a stable population level of 1,500-2,500 adult birds and minimize other limiting factors including habitat loss and illegal shooting. When the population level was estimated at 1,400-2,500 birds, the Service proposed to reclassify the species from endangered to the less critical status of threatened on August 5, 1993. However, the public expressed concern about the proposal and the Service delayed a decision because the proposed reclassification was based on old data and uncertainties remained about the hawk's actual population size and demographics. Today, there is an estimated 3,000 birds in the population, leading the Service to move forward in removing it from federal protection.

On February 3, 1997, the Service received a petition from the National Wilderness Institute of Washington, D.C., to delist the Hawaiian hawk. In 2001, the 'Io Recovery Working Group provided the Service with a report recommending the delisting of the Hawaiian hawk. The Service's proposal to remove

the bird from Endangered Species Act protection was delayed by higher-priority work.

The public comment period on today's proposed rule will be open for 60 days. The Service welcomes all comments regarding the proposed rule but is especially interested in those pertaining to biological, commercial trade, or other relevant data concerning any threats to this species; additional information concerning the range, distribution, and population size of this species, including the locations of any additional populations; current or planned activities in the areas occupied by the species and possible impacts of these activities, as well as data on population trends.

As required by the Endangered Species Act, once delisted, the Hawaiian hawk will be monitored for a minimum of five years following delisting. The Service is currently preparing a draft post-delisting monitoring plan for the Hawaiian hawk that will be available for public comment within the next few months. Post-delisting monitoring ensures that all species delisted due to recovery remain secure from risk of extinction after the protections are removed.

The Service will consider comments and materials from all interested parties received by October 6, 2008. Comments and materials concerning this proposed delisting should be sent to: Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Comments and materials may also be mailed or hand-delivered to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: RIN 1018-AU96; Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

A copy of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. Copies are also available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Honolulu at 808 792-9400.

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.