U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

Office of Communications
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS-330
Arlington, VA 22203
Phone: 703-358-2220; Fax: 703-358-1973
http://www.fws.gov

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Contact: Vanessa Kauffman
703-358-2138
vanessa_kauffman@fws.gov

Tom MacKenzie
tom_macKenzie@fws.gov
404-679-7291

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Finds 374 Aquatic-dependent Species May Warrant Endangered Species Act Protection

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will conduct an in-depth status review of 374 rare southeastern aquatic, riparian and wetland animal and plant species to determine if any or all of them warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Service made this decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, after reviewing a petition seeking to add a total of 404 species to the federal lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and analyzing information about these species in its files. While this initial review found evidence to suggest that ESA protection may be warranted for 374 of these species, the Service will now undertake a more thorough status review before determining whether to propose any of them for listing.

The review will encompass 13 amphibians, six amphipods, 17 beetles, three birds, four butterflies, six caddisflies, 81 crayfish, 14 dragonflies, 43 fish, one springfly, two isopods, four mammals, one moth, 35 mussels, six non-vascular plants, 12 reptiles, 43 snails, eight stoneflies, and 75 vascular plants. Included in the review is the Florida sandhill crane, a long-legged, long-necked gray crane that resembles herons except for the bald patch of red skin on top of its head.

“The Endangered Species Act has proved to be a critical safety net for America’s imperiled fish, wildlife, and plants. Our finding today is the first step in determining whether these species need the special protection afforded by the Act,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe.

Eighteen of the 404 species petitioned are already on the Service’s list of candidates for listing as threatened or endangered or are subjects of a proposed rule to list. The decision for one fish, the Alabama shad, was given to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) because the species is under its jurisdiction. The NMFS found that the petition did not present substantial scientific or commercial information to move forward with a 12-month finding for the Alabama shad. The Service has not yet made a finding on the remaining 11 species, but anticipates doing so no later than September 30, 2011.

Most of the species, such as the caddisflies and crayfish, are found in small areas. However, some like the green floater mussel and the black rail historically ranged over much larger areas and have seen their habitat and numbers significantly reduced. All of these species face one or more of the following threats: the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of their habitat or range; overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; disease or predation; the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and natural or manmade factors affecting the species' survival.

The status reviews for these species (other than the 18 already on the candidate list), as well as any subsequent listing proposals that may follow, will likely follow completion of a multi-year listing work plan approved by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on September 9, 2011. This work plan, developed through a settlement agreement with WildEarth Guardians and a separate, complimentary settlement agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity, will enable the agency to systematically, over a period of six years, review and address the needs of more than 250 species now on the candidate list, to determine if they require ESA protection. A list of these species is available at http://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving_ESA/listing_workplan.html.

Based on the status reviews for these 374 aquatic-dependent species, the Service will issue 12-month findings for each species and determine whether to propose them for listing. At this time, however, the 12-month findings are not scheduled to be completed within the next six years due to the priorities detailed in this court-approved work plan, unless the Service is able to combine these findings with other actions already funded and/or scheduled.

To ensure this status review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information on the 374 species from governmental agencies, Native American tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning the status of the species.

The finding will publish in the *Federal Register* on September 27, 2011. Written comments regarding the status of these 374 species may be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: *http://www.regulations.gov*. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. [FWS–R4–ES–2011–0049].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. [FWS–R4–ES–2011–0049]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before November 28, 2011. The Service will post all comments on *http://www.regulations.gov*. This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process. The Service is not able to accept email or faxes.

For further information contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, Southeast Regional Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1875 Century Blvd., Atlanta, GA 30345.

For more information about this finding, please visit the Service's Southeast regional web site at http://www.fws.gov/southeast/.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit http://www.fws.gov/endangered/.

*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****. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at http://www.youtube.com/usfws and download photos from our Flickr page at http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq.*

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