

Okaloosa Darter Downlisting

Final Rule



- Okaloosa darter was listed as endangered in 1973
- It is a small fish only known to occur in six clear stream systems in Walton and Okaloosa counties in northwest Florida.
- The darter was listed because of its very limited range, habitat degradation, and competition from another fish, the brown darter.
- The vast majority of the darter's habitat is under the management of Eglin Air Force Base.
- Working in partnership, the Service, Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and universities have accomplished a significant number of recovery efforts for the darter.
- Eglin AFB has an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan approved by the Service in 2007 and updated annually. It includes a Threatened and Endangered Species Component Plan that contains recovery actions to be completed for the Okaloosa darter.
- Eglin AFB has been successful in conserving the fish through erosion control and habitat restoration in darter watersheds. It has restored more than 534 acres at clay pit sites that were causing sedimentation of the darters' habitat, and many road crossing structures have been eliminated or replaced to allow for fish passage and proper stream function.
- A crucial project to restore Mill Creek in the Eglin Golf Course has been completed, and approximately 1,000 linear meters of stream channel with floodplain and native vegetation were restored. During initial construction of the golf course, the stream was substantially altered by culverts and other man-made impoundments.
- Monitoring efforts by the USGS and Loyola University New Orleans show the average number of darters has almost tripled at monitoring locations since 1995.
- Criteria for downlisting the species from endangered to threatened, as specified by the Okaloosa darter Recovery Plan, includes major reduction in threats to the species, significant habitat restoration, and a stable or increasing trend of darters in all darter stream systems.
- A five-year status review in 2007 showed the intent of these criteria has been met, and the Service informed the public of its proposal to downlist the species in 2010.
- The final rule to downlist took into consideration all comments and additional information from the public and scientific community.
- Because threats still exist, the darter's status will be classified as threatened.
- Although the status of this species is changed from endangered to threatened, protection for the darter will not be significantly reduced.

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