



**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southeast Region
Alabama Field Office
Panama City Field Office**



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Service Estimates Economic Impacts of Critical Habitat Designation for Eight Southeastern Mussels

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is releasing the estimated cost and economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation of eight freshwater mussels within southern Alabama and northwestern Florida, and is seeking public comment.

Last year, the Service proposed to list the Alabama pearlshell, round ebonyshell, southern sandshell, southern kidneyshell, and Choctaw bean as endangered, and the tapered pigtoe, narrow pigtoe, and fuzzy pigtoe as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service also proposed to designate critical habitat for these eight mussels.

Nine critical habitat units are being considered that encompass 1,495 miles of stream channel in Alabama and Florida. The proposed designation includes streams currently occupied by one or more of the species. A designation of this size is necessary to conserve all eight species and allow for their survival and recovery.

Critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that are essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat will help ensure that federal agencies and the public are aware of the mussels' habitat needs and proper consultation is conducted by federal agencies when required by law. A critical habitat designation does not set up a preserve or refuge and only applies to situations where federal funding or a federal permit is involved. It does not allow government or public access to private land. Federal agencies that undertake, fund, or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The Service has conducted a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation, as required under the ESA. The analysis considered the potential impact of the designation on various sectors of the economy. Based on the best available information, including extensive discussions with stakeholders, the Service estimates that the designation will

cost around \$1.4 million over 20 years, or about \$125,000 annually. The majority of these costs are administrative and are borne by Federal and state agencies; however, some costs may be incurred by local governments and businesses. These costs stem from the requirement for federal agencies to consult with the Service regarding the impacts of their actions, or those that they fund or authorize, on critical habitat. Transportation and utility activities are likely to be subject to the greatest impacts at \$1.02 million over 20 years; followed by development at \$62,300; timber management, agriculture, and grazing activities at \$56,600; and impoundments, dams, and diversions at \$13,100. The Service anticipates the proposed designation will have minimal effects on dredging, channel maintenance, in-stream mining, or small businesses. More details on the methods used to generate these estimates, as well as the estimated impacts, are available in the draft economic analysis.

The notice announcing the availability of the draft economic analysis publishes in the *Federal Register* on March 27, 2012. Following its publication, the draft economic analysis will be available at www.regulations.gov, Docket # FWS-R4-ES-2011-0050, or on the Service's website at www.fws.gov/daphne.

The Service is re-opening the public comment period for 30 days. The public may mail comments and materials concerning the economic analysis or any aspect of the proposed rule to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2011-0050; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 North Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203. Comments also can be filed electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

All comments must be received by April 26, 2012, and must include a first and last name, city, state, country and zip code. Any comments and materials we receive, as well as supporting documentation used in preparing this proposed rule, will be available for public inspection on <http://www.regulations.gov>, or by appointment during normal business hours, at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices in Panama City, Florida, at 1601 Balboa Avenue, Panama City, Florida 32405, telephone 850-769-0552, or Daphne, Alabama at 1208-B Main Street, Daphne, Alabama 36526, telephone 251-441-5181.

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