

Peer Review Plan for the Southwest Region: February 2025

Species Status Assessment Reports, Rules, and Critical Habitat

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to seek peer review of species status assessment reports or rules for the following species:

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Mineral Creek Mountainsnail

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Kisatchie Painted Crayfish

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report Addendum for the Bylas Springsnail and Gila Tryonia

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Phoenix Talussnail

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Pecos Springsnail

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Rio Grande Shiner

Estimated Timeline of Peer Review: 2025-2026

Determination: For the SSA reports being peer reviewed, these reports will inform a decision on whether these species warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. If we determine that the species warrants listing, we will publish a proposed rule to list the species and designate critical habitat with appropriate opportunities for public review and comment.

Species Status Assessment Reports for Recovery Planning

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to seek peer review of species status assessment reports, as part of the recovery planning process, for the following species:

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Three Forks Springsnail

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Bolson Tortoise

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Georgetown, Salado, and Jollyville Plateau Salamanders

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Arizona Hedgehog Cactus

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Yaqui Catfish

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Narrow-headed Gartersnake

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Loach Minnow

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the San Bernardino Springsnail

Draft Recovery Plans

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to seek peer review of draft recovery plans for the following species:

Title: Draft Recovery Plan for the Chupadera Springsnail

Title: Draft Recovery Plan for the Jemez Mountains Salamander

Title: Draft Recovery Plan for the Sonoyta Mud Turtle

Title: Draft Recovery Plan for the Sacramento Mountains Checkerspot

Title: Draft Recovery Plan for Loach Minnow

Title: Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Whooping Crane

Title: Draft Revised Recovery Plan for Chihuahua Chub and Beautiful Shiner

Estimated Timeline of Peer Review: 2025-2026

Determination: For the SSA reports being peer reviewed as part of a recovery planning process, these reports will inform a recovery plan for species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Per section 4(f) of the ESA, we develop and implement recovery plans for the conservation and survival of endangered and threatened species.

About the Peer Review Process

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016 Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our Species Status Assessment reports for these species. For proposed rules that are not informed by SSA reports, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the proposed rules. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report, rule, or plan is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the Species Status Assessment process, rules, or recovery plans as appropriate.

The Service will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria.

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with the species biology, habitats in which they occur, and/or threats to the species.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting, or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the Species Status Assessment Report, rule, or draft recovery plan, and a conflict-of-interest form. Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of the scientific information and analyses and whether the best available information was used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; help ensure that scientific uncertainties are identified and characterized; provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document; and inform us of any scientific information that we did not use. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations; and (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations.

About Public Participation

This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. The SSA, along with the final decision document, will be made available to the public through a news release, direct mail to interested parties, and posts on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment: (1) if we prepare a proposed rule to list the species as endangered or threatened and designate critical habitat; or (2) when we post a draft recovery plan. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final listing rule and designation of critical habitat

following consideration of all comments received from the public. Following public review and comment on a draft recovery plan, we will prepare a final recovery plan for that species.

Contact

For more information, contact:

Three Forks Springsnail, Arizona Hedgehog Cactus, Yaqui Catfish, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Narrow-headed Gartersnake, Loach Minnow, San Bernardino Springsnail, Sonoyta Mud Turtle, Bylas Springsnail, Gila Tryonia, Phoenix Talussnail: Field Office Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 602-242-0210, email: incomingazcorr@fws.gov

Kisatchie Painted Crayfish, Pecos Springsnail, Rio Grande Shiner: Field Office Supervisor, Texas Coastal and Central Plains Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 281-286-8282, email: HoustonESFO@fws.gov

Mineral Creek Mountainsnail, Bolson Tortoise, Chupadera Springsnail, Jemez Mountains Salamander, Sacramento Mountains Checkerspot, Chihuahua Chub, Beautiful Shiner: Field Office Supervisor, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 505-346-2525, email: nmesfo@fws.gov

Georgetown, Salado, and Jollyville Plateau Salamanders: Field Office Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 512-490-0057