

Peer Review Plan for the Southwest Region: June 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 Aztec Gilia

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Correll's False Dragon-Head

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Sabino Dancer

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Chisos Mountain Crested Coralroot

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 Fickeisen Plains and Peebles Navajo Cactus

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Neches River Rosemallow

Title: Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Yuma Ridgway's Rail

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.

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 Fickeisen Plains and Peebles Navajo Cactus

Title: Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Mount Graham Red Squirrel

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:

Sabino Dancer, Fickeisen Plains and Peebles Navajo Cactus, Mount Graham Red Squirrel, Yuma Ridgway's Rail: Field Office Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 602-242-0210, email: incomingazcorr@fws.gov

Correll's False Dragon-Head, Neches River Rosemallow: Field Office Supervisor, Texas Coastal and Central Plains Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 281-286-8282, email: HoustonESFO@fws.gov

Aztec Gilia: Field Office Supervisor, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, telephone: 505-346-2525, email: nmesfo@fws.gov

Chisos Mountain Crested Coralroot, Georgetown Salamander: Field Office Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, esaustininfo@fws.gov telephone: 512-490-0057