

On November 7, 2019, we published a revised proposed rule to list the West Coast DPS of fisher, a singular DPS configuration comprised of several separate subpopulations ranging from southern Oregon to the southern Sierra Nevada in California. In that rule, we explained that we had evaluated new information available since our 2014 proposed rule and reconsidered the best available information already in our files, and concluded that this DPS met the definition of a threatened species based on the cumulative effect of multiple threats across its range. From the publication of the revised proposed rule and the closing of its public comment period, we began the process of moving forward with finalizing the listing of the DPS.

However, during this process, and in response to numerous public comments received about the DPS configuration, we again re-examined whether the singular DPS configuration was the most ecologically appropriate in the context of conservation of the fisher. The primary subpopulations making up the proposed singular DPS, the NCSO at the northern periphery of the singular DPS range and the SSN at its southern boundary, are considered the “historically native” subpopulations (i.e., those subpopulations of known fishers indigenous to the northern California/southern Oregon region and the southern Sierra Nevada region, each with unique genetic characteristics). While the NCSO subpopulation also encompasses two other smaller subpopulations in relatively close proximity (NSN and SOC), the vast majority of the general NCSO subpopulation is comprised of fishers historically indigenous to this geographic region. The SSN subpopulation consists solely of fishers historically indigenous to the southern Sierra Nevada region, and there is no ecological or biological connection between them and fishers in

the NCSO, a fact acknowledged and underscored by the state of California's recent CESA listing determination which viewed them as wholly separate entities.

While the public comments about our proposed singular DPS configuration presented a broad range of positions, there was also a relatively consistent theme regarding the appropriateness of evaluating and managing these two primarily-indigenous subpopulations separately. In addition to the lack of any ecological or biological connection between these populations, another consistent theme in many of the public comments also led us to consider two other pertinent points as we re-examined the DPS approach: 1. The threats we identified as acting on fishers were not uniform across the range of the singular DPS, with their magnitude and scale being significantly different between the NCSO and SSN subpopulations and, 2. The same was true for conservation actions working to ameliorate threats to fishers, with much more conservation work being done and planned for the NCSO region than for SSN.

In light of all the above, the Pacific Southwest Regional Office convened a meeting on February 4, 2020 with the cadre of Service staff and managers involved with this DPS listing package, including management and staff from Regions 1 and 8, and management and staff from the multiple Ecological Services Field Offices working on the rule. During this meeting all of the information above was discussed in depth, and at the end of the meeting management from both Regional Offices determined the most appropriate path forward was to revise our DPS approach, evaluating whether the two subpopulations, NCSO and SSN, each met the criteria as separate, individual DPSs, and if so, assess the listing status of each.

From that point, a focused team of staff from both Regions conducted an analysis of the two subpopulations and determined that both met the DPS criteria for discreteness and significance, and could therefore be evaluated to see if either met the definition of an endangered

or a threatened species. Upon further examination of each separate DPS, the team concluded that, while the magnitude of the threats identified in our 2019 revised proposed rule have not changed substantially from our previous consideration, what did change in their analysis was the consideration of their distribution across the ranges of the two separate DPSs, as opposed to the previously singular DPS configuration, and then how the impact of those threats affects each separate DPS where they occur. This analysis revealed that the threats active in the range of the NCSO DPS are substantially less impactful to the fisher populations occupying the area, while the threats in the SSN DPS will have a significantly greater impact on fishers there. In addition, as mentioned above, closer examination of conservation efforts intended to ameliorate the effects of threats acting on fishers led us to conclude these efforts provide a greater than previously determined positive effect on fisher populations in the NCSO DPS. These two things combined, an unequal manifestation of both threats and conservation efforts, supported our change from the 2019 revised proposed rule, resulting in our determinations that the NCSO DPS did not meet the definition of either a threatened or endangered species, while the SSN DPS met the definition of an endangered species throughout all its range.