

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Levitt 202/343-5634

CRITICAL HABITAT FOR SIX SPECIES PROPOSED

Six of America's most seriously endangered species will gain additional Federal protection under a proposal to determine the habitat that is critical to their survival, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposal, published in the Federal Register on December 16, lists the known critical habitat of the whooping crane, American crocodile, California condor, Indiana bat, Florida manatee, and the snail darter. Interested persons have until February 20, 1976, to submit written comments.

If these critical habitats are adopted, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 would require all Federal agencies to take such action as is necessary to insure that activities authorized, funded, or carried out by them do not result in the destruction or modification of these areas. The agencies could, however, undertake actions which are not considered to be detrimental to these species.

--The current population of the American crocodile is estimated to be between 200 and 300 individuals with fewer than 10 breeding females. It occupies southern portions of the Everglades, northern Keys, and Florida Bay. Parts of these areas have been proposed as critical habitat.

--The whooping crane, with a known wild adult population of only 60, migrates from Canada's Northwest Territories to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. A number of areas along its migration route are proposed as critical habitat including parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, and

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Nebraska. Several sites along the expected migration route of other whooping cranes, hatched this year and transplanted to Idaho in an experimental project, are also considered critical and include parts of Idaho, Colorado, and New Mexico.

--The California condor, with a population numbering less than 50, is found in the Los Padres National Forest and in primarily mountainous regions north of Los Angeles.

--Approximately 94 percent of the known population of the Indiana bat hibernates in caves and mines in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, and West Virginia. This tiny, 2- to 3-inch species is entirely dependent on the shelter provided by these caves.

--The Florida manatee is found in rivers, canals, and coastal waters of that State. These areas are critical because the animals are dependent on the extensive vegetation found there as a primary food source.

--The snail darter, a 3-inch long species of fish, occupies a 12-mile stretch of the Little Tennessee River in Tennessee. The fish inhabits only portions of clean, gravel shoals with cool, swift, low-turbidity water. Its food is almost exclusively snails which are abundant on these shoals and also require a clean gravel bottom for their survival. The Tennessee Valley Authority's proposed Tellico Dam would result in the total destruction of the snail darter's present known habitat.

Public comments and suggestions on this proposed rulemaking are desired. Interested persons should submit written comments, preferably in triplicate to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036.