

Frequently Asked Questions

Slenderclaw Crayfish Listing, Endangered, Critical Habitat Designation

1. What action is being finalized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

The Service is listing the slenderclaw crayfish as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and designating critical habitat.

In October 2018, as a result of the completion of a [Species Status Assessment](#) (SSA), 12-month finding and 60-day public comment period, the Service proposed to list the slenderclaw crayfish as a threatened species with a 4(d) rule, along with critical habitat. During the 60-day public comment period, we received ten public comments and assessed them before issuing the final rule. After further consideration of the invasion of the non-native virile crayfish and low numbers of slenderclaw crayfish, we determined the risk of extinction was higher than originally determined. Since the species is determined to be an endangered species, the proposed 4(d) rule no longer applies.

2. What was the process for finalizing this action?

In our final rulemaking, we analyzed information received through public comments. Within one to two years of a listing proposal, we may: 1) publish a final listing rule as originally proposed or later revised because the best available biological data support it; 2) withdraw the proposal because the biological information does not support the listing; or 3) extend the proposal if there is substantial disagreement within the scientific community concerning the biological appropriateness of the listing. The ESA requires the Service to make a decision based on the best available science, and as such, determined our criteria matched the first option.

3. What is the slenderclaw crayfish's historical range and where can it be found?

The historical range of the slenderclaw crayfish included four small streams or tributaries within the two watersheds in the Tennessee River, Alabama. Historically, it was known to be in five sites: one site in Short Creek, one site in Shoal Creek, two sites in Scarham Creek, and one in Bengis Creek.

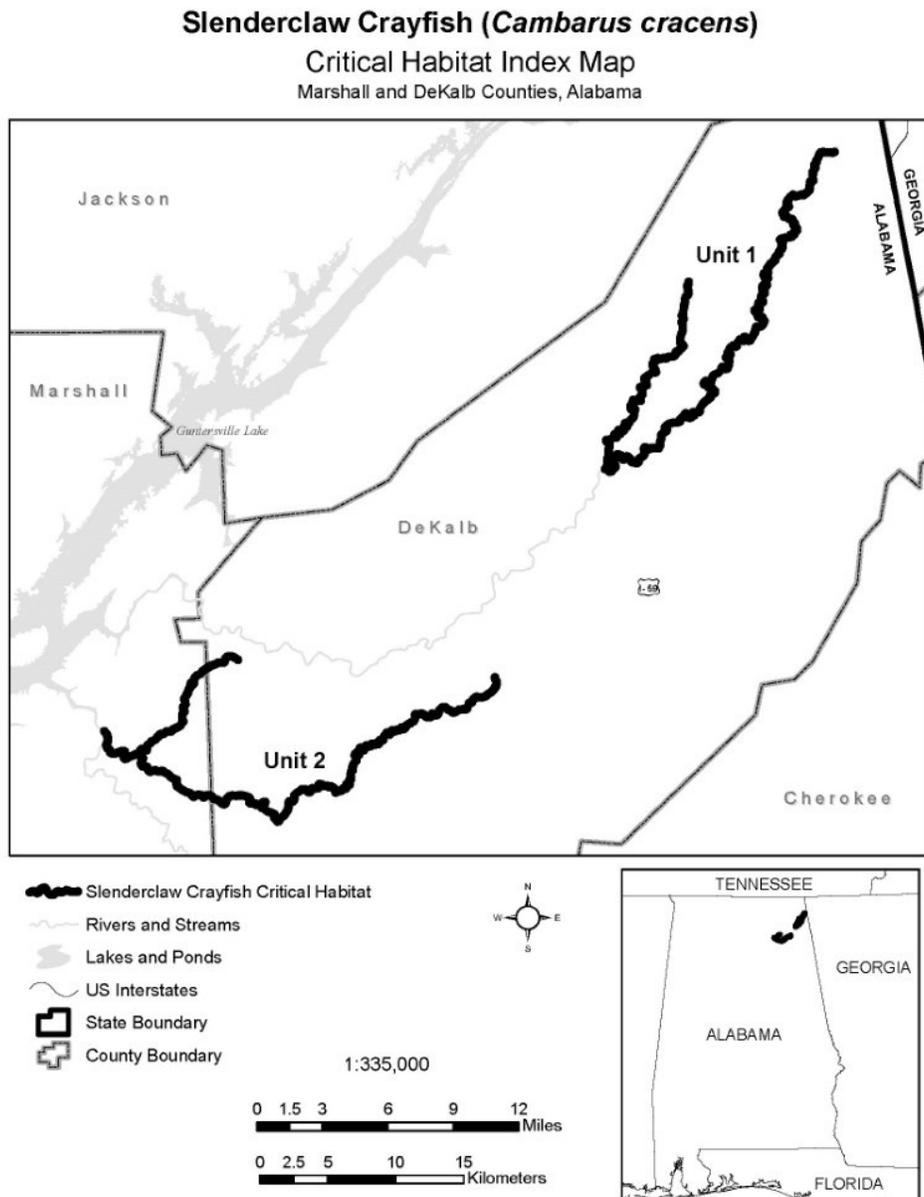
Currently, the slenderclaw crayfish is in five sites within two populations: Three sites in Shoal Creek and two sites in the Town Creek watershed (one in Bengis Creek and one in Town Creek). The site on Short Creek, where the slenderclaw crayfish is no longer found, is now occupied by the non-native virile crayfish, which has been identified as the primary threat to the slenderclaw crayfish.

4. What is critical habitat?

Establishing critical habitat raises awareness of the needs of the slenderclaw crayfish and other imperiled species and focuses the efforts of our conservation partners. It also alerts federal agencies that they are required to make special conservation efforts when they work, fund or permit activities in those areas. It does not set up a preserve or refuge, but it may require special management considerations in the identified areas. Designating critical habitat under the ESA does not affect private landowners unless the action involves federal funds, permits or other federal activities. The final decision to designate critical habitat is based on the best scientific information available.

5. What are the final critical habitat units for the slenderclaw crayfish?

The final critical habitat designation for the slenderclaw crayfish consists of 52 river miles of occupied habitat and 26 river miles of habitat currently unoccupied, but historically occupied, by the crayfish. In total 78 river miles are being designated in DeKalb and Marshall counties in Alabama. The two units are privately owned except for the bridge crossings and road easements, which are publicly owned by the state and counties. Unit 1 includes stream habitat in Bengis and Town creeks. Unit 2 includes stream habitat in Shoal, Scarham and Short creeks. The critical habitat does not include riparian areas, only instream habitat..



Critical habitat map for the slenderclaw crayfish.

6. Why were these units included in the critical habitat designation?

The slenderclaw crayfish occurs in small to medium flowing streams with intact native vegetation on the stream banks and boulder and cobble substrates. In addition, the crayfish needs abundant space within each habitat type for sheltering and adequate seasonal water flows to maintain connectivity of streams. The streams included in the critical habitat designation are essential for the conservation of the slenderclaw crayfish.

7. Where can I find a copy of this final rule?

The complete listing rule can be obtained by visiting the Federal eRulemaking Portal: [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) at Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2018-0069. This final rule is effective on October 8, 2021