

Peer Review Plan: Proposed Critical Habitat Designation for Georgetown and Salado Salamanders

About the Document

Title: The Service revising our proposed designation of critical habitat for the Georgetown salamander (*Eurycea naufragia*) and Salado salamander (*Eurycea chisholmensis*) in Bell and Williamson Counties, Texas. Based on published genetic analyses, we are revising the distribution of the Georgetown and Salado salamanders and are adjusting previously proposed critical habitat units accordingly. We also propose changes to our description of the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species. We propose a total of approximately 1,519 acres (ac) (622 hectares (ha)) of critical habitat for the species in Bell and Williamson Counties, Texas. The total amount of critical habitat we are proposing for both salamanders has increased by approximately 116 ac (47 ha). The reasons for this increase are the addition of a new occupied site for the Salado salamander and refined mapping of previously proposed critical habitat units based on more precise spring locations.

About the Peer Review Process

Estimated Peer Review Timeline: November 2020 – December 2020

Peer review process:

- We, the Service, will choose three or more independent peer reviewers and invite comment letters from the peer reviewers.
- Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document.
- The scientific peer review is being held separate to the public review process of the proposal. Therefore, no public comments will be available or provided to the peer reviewers.

Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** Reviewers will be experts in ecology of Georgetown salamander or Salado salamander (or both) or related species, threats to the species, or a related field.
- **Independence:** Reviewers will not be employed by the Service. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service, if the government supports their work.

- Objectivity: Reviewers will be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. The reviewers should be comfortable sharing their knowledge and identifying their knowledge gaps.
- Advocacy: Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species.
- Conflict of Interest: Reviewers will not have any financial or other interest that conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.

About public participation

Our critical habitat document has been made available to the public through news releases, direct mailings, and posting on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment). If appropriate, the Service will implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final designation of critical habitat following consideration of all comments received from the public and peer reviewers.

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.

Contact

For more information, contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, at 512-577-6594. Also see the species profile for the Georgetown and Salado Salamanders via the Service's Endangered Species website, at:

<https://ecos.fws.gov/>

A copy of the determination will be posted on this website upon completion.