

Peer Review Plan

Proposed Endangered Species Status and the proposed designation of critical habitat for the Black Warrior waterdog (*Necturus alabamensis*).

About the Document

Title: Proposed Endangered Species Status and the proposed designation of critical habitat for the Black Warrior waterdog (*Necturus alabamensis*).

Purpose: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared a proposal to list an amphibian endemic to the Black Warrior Basin in North West Alabama as endangered, under the Endangered Species Act (Act). The Service is also proposing to designate critical habitat for this amphibian. The proposed rule to designate critical habitat is being published concurrently elsewhere in the Federal Register.

Proposed rules:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R4-ES-2016-0029 (proposed endangered status) and FWS-R4-ES-2016-0031 (proposed critical habitat designation), which are the docket numbers for the proposed listing and critical habitat. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) *By hard copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2016-0029 and FWS-R4-ES-2016-0031, for the proposed listing and critical habitat; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; MS: PDM, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

If you would prefer that we send you digital copies of the rules please contact Matt Laschet at Matthias_Laschet@fws.gov.

About the Peer Review Process

Type of Review: Influential

Date of Peer Review: Peer reviews will occur between October 6, 2016 and December 5, 2016.

Estimated Dissemination Date of the Final Rulemaking Document: October 6, 2017

Process: The Service solicited written comments from at least three independent scientific reviewers. Formal request for peer review was made by individual letters to experts from various backgrounds at several universities, institutions, and agencies. Reviewers have been selected by the Service for their recognized expertise with North Alabama ecosystems, as well as general expertise with amphibian ecology and conservation. We are following our national policy on peer review and our regional approach for peer review for rulemakings. In selecting peer reviewers, we considered four key factors – expertise, balance, independence, and avoidance of conflict of interest.

This peer reviews are occurring concurrently with the public comment period for the proposed actions. The public comment period is now open and will close on December 5, 2016. The Service will use the information received from the peer review process, as appropriate, to develop the final listing rules for the taxa indicated above.

The Service has provided each peer reviewer with information necessary to complete the peer reviews. We have requested that reviewers use the Southeast Region’s guidance to ensure that reviews comply with the 1994 policy statement for listing and critical habitat designation under the Act. Peer reviewers are expected to: review all material provided; identify, review, and provide other relevant data; and, provide written comments on relevance and soundness of data, analysis or assumptions of data, and whether we have used the best available science in making the proposed determinations. Peer review comments will be public documents.

About Public Participation

Public comments on the proposed listing and proposed designation of critical habitat will be sought with the proposed rules published in the *Federal Register* and by mail to interested parties, a press release of the availability of the proposals to interested parties, and a public hearing if requested. The Service will consider all comments received prior to publishing a final determination.

The Service published a notice in the *Federal Register* for proposed listing as endangered and another notice for the proposed designation of critical habitat for the Black Warrior waterdog (*Necturus alabamensis*).

Summaries of the results of the peer reviews will also be published with the final rule determinations in the *Federal Register*.

This peer review plan is made available on this website to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

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