

Peer Review Plan Species Status Assessment for Penasco Least Chipmunk

Peer Review Plan:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will seek peer review on the Species Status Assessment (SSA) for the Penasco Least Chipmunk (*Neotamius minimus atristriatus*). The purpose of the SSA is to provide support to the USFWS for a decision on whether to propose listing and propose critical habitat designation for the Penasco least chipmunk, in accordance with section 4 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

Estimated Peer Review Timeline: July 2018

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with the USFWS July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the USFWS August 22, 2016 Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our SSA for the Penasco least chipmunk.

The USFWS will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria.

- **Expertise:** Reviewers will have knowledge of or experience with the Penasco least chipmunk or species with similar biology.
- **Independence:** Reviewers will not be employed by the USFWS. Academic, consulting or government scientists will have sufficient independence from the USFWS if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** Reviewers will be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, reviewers will be comfortable sharing their knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying their knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Reviewers will not have any financial or other interests that conflict with or could impair objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the USFWS will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the SSA for the Penasco least chipmunk.

The USFWS will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining his or her role and instructions for fulfilling that role; the SSA; and a list of citations as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information within the SSA, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into any potential rulemaking process or recovery planning. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. USFWS will ask the reviewers to comment specifically on the data and information used in the SSA; assess assumptions made and conclusions reached by the authors; identify any oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in the data or interpretation of the data; ensure that uncertainties are identified; and provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions put to the reviewers may include but are not limited to the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution of the subspecies accurate?
2. Are our assumptions and definitions of suitable habitat logical and adequate?
3. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
4. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the USFWS. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our final determinations; and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the supporting record.

About Public Participation:

The final SSA will be made available to the public via posting on USFWS websites. An ESA listing decision document will be made available to the public through news releases, direct mailings, and posting on USFWS websites (with solicitations for public comment if we prepare a proposed rule to list the subspecies as threatened or endangered). If appropriate, the USFWS would implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the USFWS would publish a final listing and 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 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

Contact Information:

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