



News Release

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Zuni Bluehead Sucker May Need Federal Protection

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

To conserve the Zuni bluehead sucker, whose distribution rangewide has been reduced by over 90 percent in the last 20 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to list the Zuni bluehead sucker as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The service has also identified and is proposing to designate approximately 293 miles of stream habitat as critical for the species. The critical habitat is being proposed on lands primarily owned by Forest Service, State of New Mexico, Navajo Nation, and Zuni Pueblo.

The Service is opening a 60 day comment period for peer review and public input on these two proposals and will accept comments received or postmarked on or before March 26, 2013.

Comments may be submitted by one of the following methods:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R2-ES-2012-0101 (for the listing proposal) or FWS-R2-ES-2013-0002 (for the critical habitat proposal), which are the docket numbers for these rulemakings. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. 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-R2-ES-2012-0101 or FWS-R2-ES-2013-0002; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains these species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species. Designation of critical habitat does not

affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Specifying the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species helps Federal agencies identify where to utilize measures that will benefit the species as required by the Act. Designating critical habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as Tribes, State and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. When the designation of critical habitat occurs near the time of listing it provides early conservation planning guidance to bridge the gap until the Service can complete more thorough recovery planning.

The Zuni bluehead sucker, a candidate for listing since 2001, has been found in San Juan, McKinley, and Cibola counties in New Mexico; and Apache county in eastern Arizona inhabiting stream reaches with clean, perennial water flows. Threats include water withdrawals, sedimentation, impoundments, housing development, and predation by nonnative green sunfish.

The Zuni bluehead sucker has a torpedo-shaped, slender body with a mouth below and slightly behind the tip of the snout. Most individuals do not exceed 8 inches in total length. The Zuni bluehead sucker has a bluish head, silvery-tan to dark green back, and yellowish to silvery-white sides and abdomen. Adults are mottled slate-gray to almost black on the upper part of the body and cream-white underneath toward the abdomen. Most specimens were found in water that was 12 to 20 inches deep, with cobble, boulders, and bedrock substrate. Zuni bluehead suckers feed primarily on algae scraped from rocks, rubble, and gravel substrates.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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