



News Release

Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

For Release: March 31, 2010

Contacts: Jim Rorabaugh (520) 670-6150 x230
Marit Alanen (520) 670-6150 x234
Jeff Humphrey (602) 242-0210 x222

TUCSON SHOVEL-NOSED SNAKE WARRANTS FEDERAL PROTECTION - More Imperiled Species to be Protected First-

A thorough, peer-reviewed, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assessment of the Tucson shovel-nosed snake has found that the snake warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The species will be added to the federal list of candidate species while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk of extinction. The Service will annually review the finding until a listing proposal is published or new information indicates that ESA listing is not warranted.

The Tucson shovel-nosed snake is threatened throughout its entire range, a roughly 35 mile-wide swath running along the Phoenix-Tucson corridor, in northeastern Pima, southwestern Pinal and eastern Maricopa counties. Threats affecting the subspecies include habitat loss and fragmentation – due to urban and rural development; road construction, use and maintenance; potential solar power facilities; agriculture and wildfires – and a lack of adequate management and regulation.

“Our assessment revealed that there is some scientific disagreement over the validity of the subspecies, but one thing is clear – the range and abundance of the Tucson shovel-nosed snake have suffered as a result of the loss of sandy washes and desert floodplain habitat,” said Steve Spangle, the Service’s Arizona field supervisor. “Heightened attention to the snake and its habitat, along with cooperative conservation involving multiple partners, will be essential to reversing its decline in the face of continuing habitat loss.”

The Tucson shovel-nosed snake is one of four shovel-nosed subspecies. They are small snakes (10-17 inches in length) with a shovel-shaped snout and coloring that mimics coral snakes. Shovel-nosed snakes are primarily nocturnal and move by “sand swimming” – a sideways swaying motion while either on or under sand or loose soil. Feeding primarily on scorpions, beetle larvae, spiders, and centipedes, they occur in soft, sandy floodplains in creosote/mesquite-dominated desert areas in south-central Arizona.

The Tucson shovel-nosed snake will be added to the list of candidate species eligible for Endangered Species Act protection. While candidate species receive no statutory protection under the ESA, inclusion on the candidate list promotes cooperative conservation efforts for these species. The Service’s ultimate goal, which is shared by many state wildlife agencies, private organizations and individuals, is to intervene and successfully address the needs of candidate species so that listing is no longer needed.

For example, the Service provides technical assistance and competitive matching grants to private landowners, states and territories undertaking conservation efforts on behalf of candidate species. The Service also works with interested landowners to develop Candidate Conservation Agreements. These voluntary agreements allow citizens to manage their property in ways that benefit candidate species, in some cases precluding the need to list the species. These agreements can also be developed to provide regulatory certainty for landowners should the species become listed under the ESA.

Addressing the needs of candidate species before the regulatory requirements of the ESA come into play often allows greater management flexibility to stabilize or restore these species and their habitats. In addition, as threats are reduced and populations are increased or stabilized, attention can be shifted to those candidate species in greatest need of the ESA's protective measures.

Information regarding the status of, and any potential threat to, the Tucson shovel-nosed snake will be of value to the annual review of today's finding and may be submitted by mail to Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951 or by email to Marit Alanen at marit_alanen@fws.gov.

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.

- www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/ -