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Austin Blind and Jollyville Plateau Salamanders Protected Under the Endangered Species Act

Final Decisions for Georgetown and Salado Salamanders Extended for Six Months

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today the listing of the Austin blind and Jollyville Plateau salamanders under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the designation of 4,451 acres of critical habitat for both species in portions of Travis and Williamson Counties, Texas. The Service is also publishing a 6-month extension of the final determinations for the Georgetown and Salado salamanders and is reopening the public comment period for 30 days.

The Service is listing the Austin blind salamander as an endangered species. Based on new information received since publication of the August 22, 2012, listing proposal, the Service is listing the Jollyville Plateau salamander as threatened and not endangered. The Service is designating critical habitat in 33 units in Travis and Williamson Counties, Texas. Overall, the total amount of critical habitat designated in the final rule decreased 603 acres compared to the proposed rule.

Public comments received by the Service since publication of the August 22, 2012, listing proposal have expressed concerns related to the sufficiency and accuracy of the available data related to the listing proposal for the Georgetown and Salado salamanders. In consideration of these concerns, the Service is extending the final listing and critical habitat determinations for these two species in order to solicit scientific information that will help clarify these issues.

“We have carefully evaluated the public comments received on the salamander proposal and our actions reflect the best available science,” said Adam Zerrenner, the Service’s Austin Field Office Supervisor. “The Service is committed to continuing to work with the local communities, landowners and others to conserve the salamanders and the Edwards Aquifer. A healthy Edwards Aquifer is important for the continued vitality of the communities as well as the plant and animal species dependent upon it.”

The most significant threat to the salamander species is the degradation of habitat in the form of reduced water quality and quantity, and disturbance of spring sites. Water quality and quantity in the Edwards Aquifer is being negatively impacted by increasing urbanization and human population

growth in areas that flow to where the salamanders are found. Recent drought conditions are also negatively impacting water resources.

The Austin blind, Jollyville Plateau, Georgetown, and Salado salamanders are entirely aquatic and dependent upon water from the Edwards Aquifer for their survival, growth, and reproduction. The Austin blind salamander resides in the Barton Springs Segment of the Edwards Aquifer, while the other three species reside in habitat dependent on the northern segment of the Edwards Aquifer, including springs and spaces in the subsurface aquifer. The Jollyville Plateau salamander also depends on groundwater from other aquifer sources, such as the Trinity Aquifer and local alluvial aquifers

The final rules for the Austin blind and Jollyville Plateau salamanders publish in the *Federal Register* on August 20, 2013, and will be effective 30 days after publication. Copies of the final rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/>. Copies are also available at the Service's Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758 or by calling 512-490-0057.

During the reopened 30-day public comment period for the Georgetown and Salado salamanders, the Service is soliciting input from concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry and other interested parties. Written comments must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on September 19, 2013. For further information on how and where to submit comments and to review and/or download these documents visit the Service's Southwest Region's website at www.fws.gov/southwest. The Service will make a final listing determination for the Georgetown and Salado salamanders no later than February 22, 2014.

The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

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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