



Frequently Asked Questions: Final Special Rule for the Georgetown Salamander

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Contacts: Adam Zerrenner, (512) 490-0057, Adam_Zerrenner@fws.gov
Lesli Gray, (972) 439-4542, Lesli_Gray@fws.gov

Q. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

A. In February 2014, the Service listed the Georgetown salamander as threatened and proposed a 4(d) rule for the species. The original proposed 4(d) rule for the Georgetown salamander stated that incidental take resulting from activities consistent with conservation measures in the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone Water Quality Ordinance would not be prohibited under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Since the time of the proposed 4(d) rule, the City of Georgetown incorporated and expanded upon the ordinance in their Unified Development Code (UDC), which is the primary tool used by the city to regulate development. Therefore, in April 2015, we revised the proposed 4(d) rule to provide clarity around the activities that would be covered by the rule.

Under the final 4(d) rule, take of the Georgetown salamander will not be a violation of section 9 of the ESA if the activity occurs on non-federal lands and is consistent with the water quality protection measures in the UDC.

Q. How will the 4(d) rule benefit conservation of the Georgetown salamander?

A. The Georgetown salamander is entirely aquatic and depends on water from the Edwards Aquifer in sufficient quantity and quality for survival, growth and reproduction. Degradation of habitat, in the form of reduced water quality and quantity and disturbance of spring sites are the main threats to this species. Since the August 2012 listing proposal, Williamson County and the City of Georgetown have adopted water quality ordinances designed to reduce threats to the Georgetown salamander from urban development. The measures in Georgetown's UDC are expected to limit water quality degradation throughout the watersheds that support the Georgetown salamander, thereby contributing to the conservation of the species. Through the final 4(d) rule, the Service is supporting and encouraging a local solution to protecting the Georgetown salamander. We will continue to work cooperatively and in partnership with Williamson County, State agencies and other partners to conserve the Georgetown

salamander and the Edwards Aquifer as part of the Adaptive Management Working Group (Working Group).

Q. What is a 4(d) special rule?

A. The ESA allows the Service to define the prohibited activities for species listed as threatened. These activities are defined through a special rule under section 4(d) of the ESA. The Georgetown salamander 4(d) rule would exempt take that results from activities that use the water quality protection measures contained in the City of Georgetown's UDC. The conservation measures in the UDC provide a variety of water quality protection measures designed to lessen impacts to the water quality of springs and streams in the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

Q. How will the Service monitor implementation of the 4(d) rule for the Georgetown salamander?

A. A Service representative will sit on and participate in the Working Group, which was established by the UDC. This Working group is responsible for reviewing data from UDC implementation on a regular basis and making recommendations for specific changes in the management directions related to the water quality protection measures in the UDC.

Q. Where is the Georgetown salamander found?

A. The species resides in habitat dependent on the northern segment of the Edwards Aquifer, including springs, spring-fed streams, caves, and spaces in the subsurface aquifer.

Q. What are the primary threats to the salamander?

A. The most significant threat to the salamander is the future degradation of habitat in the form of reduced water quality and quantity and disturbance of spring sites. Increasing urbanization in areas where the salamander is found will result in impacts to water quality. Recent drought conditions and human population growth are also negatively impacting water resources, reducing the quality and quantity of available habitat for the salamander.