



News Release

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

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For Immediate Release

Contacts: Bill Seawell, (512) 490-0057 ext. 232
Lesli Gray, (972) 569-8588

DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CONSERVATION ACTION TO PROTECT NINE BEXAR COUNTY INVERTEBRATES RELEASED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced the Notice of Availability of the draft economic analysis (DEA) for the proposed critical habitat for nine Bexar County invertebrates. The DEA estimates that the present value impacts of critical habitat designation are between \$1.62 million to \$35.6 million (\$153,000 to \$3,360,000 on an annualized basis) over 20 years (2012 through 2031), assuming a seven percent discount rate. The Service is also announcing a public hearing and the reopening of the comment period on the proposed critical habitat for the nine Bexar invertebrates. Publication of this proposal in the *Federal Register* begins a 30-day public comment period.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, 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.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of designating it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless that would jeopardize the existence of a threatened or endangered species.

The DEA provides estimated costs of the foreseeable potential economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation for the nine Bexar County invertebrates over the next 20 years. It identifies potential incremental costs as a result of the proposed critical habitat designation; these are those costs attributed to critical habitat over and above those baseline costs attributed to listing. The DEA quantifies economic impacts of nine Bexar County invertebrates conservation efforts associated with (1) development, (2) transportation projects, (3) utility projects, and (4) species/habitat management.

On February 22, 2011, the Service published a proposal to designate or revise critical habitat for the following nine Bexar County invertebrates: *Rhadine exilis* (ground beetle, no common name); *Rhadine infernalis* (ground beetle, no common name); Helotes mold beetle (*Batrisodes venyivi*); Cokendolpher Cave harvestman (*Texella cokendolpheri*); Robber Baron Cave meshweaver (*Cicurina baronia*); Madla Cave meshweaver (*Cicurina madla*); Braken Bat Cave meshweaver (*Cicurina venii*); the Government Canyon Bat Cave meshweaver (*Cicurina vespera*); and Government Canyon Bat Cave spider (*Neoleptoneta microps*).

The Bexar County invertebrates inhabit caves or other features known as “karst.” The term karst refers to a type of terrain that is formed by the slow dissolution of calcium carbonate from limestone bedrock by mildly acidic groundwater. This process creates numerous cave openings, cracks, fissures, fractures, and sinkholes, and the bedrock resembles Swiss cheese. All of these species are subterranean-dwelling, non-aquatic species of local distribution in north and northwest Bexar County, Texas. They spend their entire lives underground, but surface features are very important as they provide links to drainage and pathways for nutrients to enter the caves.

In total, approximately 6,906 acres (ac) (2,795 hectares (ha)) are being proposed for revised or designated critical habitat. This does not include 4,104 acres (1,661 ha) of land that is protected by the Camp Bullis Military Reservation’s Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan.

In releasing the draft economic analysis, the Service is also reopening the public comment period on the revised proposed critical habitat for the nine Bexar County invertebrates. The Service will accept public comments received or postmarked on or before September 1, 2011. The Service will hold a public hearing on August 17, 2011. The hearing will be held at the Casa Helotes Senior Citizen Center, 12070 Leslie Road, Helotes, Texas. The hearing is open to all who wish to provide formal, oral comments regarding the proposed critical habitat rule. The hearing will be held from 6:15 p.m. to 7:50 p.m., with an informational session from 5:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.

For more information on this proposal, what to comment on, or how to submit comments, see the *Federal Register* notice on our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest>.

For further information contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, Texas 78758; by telephone at 512-490-0057 x248; or by facsimile at 512-490-0974. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

America’s fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We’re working to actively engage 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/endangered/>.

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

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