



Questions and Answers: Concho water snake Final Delisting

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

A. Citing the effects of a multi-year conservation effort involving the Colorado River Municipal Water District and other partners, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar today announced the Concho water snake has fully recovered and no longer requires the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In addition, the Service is removing the federally designated critical habitat for the Concho water snake.

Q. Why is the Service taking this action now?

A. The Service's determination to remove the Concho water snake from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife is based on a thorough review of all available information, including new information, which indicates that the threats to this species have been eliminated or reduced to the point that the species has recovered and no longer meets the definition of threatened or endangered under the Act.

A review of the best scientific and commercial data currently available indicates that all three criteria in the Concho water snake recovery plan (adequate instream flows even after delisting, viable populations in each of the three major river reaches, and movement of snakes to assure adequate genetic mixing) have been met. The recovery of the Concho water snake has been a dynamic process, fostered by the significant amount of new data collected on the biology and ecology of the species by numerous species experts.

Q. What is the Concho water snake?

A. The Concho water snake has a relatively short life that rarely exceeds five years. It is a small snake compared to most other water snakes, with adults rarely exceeding 3 feet in total length. This nonvenomous snake has four rows of alternating dark brown spots or blotches on its back, two rows on each side. The coloration on its back is similar to a checkerboard of dark brown spots on a gray, brown, or reddish-brown color. The Concho water snake has a light pinkish or orange belly that is unmarked or has somewhat indistinct spots along the sides.

Q. Where is the Concho water snake found?

A. The Concho water snake is now found only in the Colorado and Concho Rivers in central Texas. It occurs on the Colorado River from E.V. Spence Reservoir to Colorado Bend State Park, including Ballinger Municipal Lake and O.H. Ivie Reservoir, and on the Concho River from the City of San Angelo to its confluence with the Colorado River at O.H. Ivie Reservoir. The Concho water snake can be found in rivers and streams, and on artificial shoreline habitat of the three reservoirs. In rivers, the Concho water snake is found mainly in or near riffles while in reservoirs, snakes are usually found in rocky areas near the habitats associated with schools of small fishes, such as shallow, rocky shorelines. Counties of known occurrence include Brown, Coke, Coleman, Concho, Lampasas, McCulloch, Mills, Runnels, San Saba, and Tom Green.

Q. What is the agency doing to ensure the continued survival of the Concho water snake now that it is delisted?

A. The Service has prepared a post-delisting monitoring (PDM) plan for the Concho water snake in cooperation with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Colorado River Municipal Water District. Over a 15-year period, surveys will be conducted to measure the presence and abundance of snakes across its range and to evaluate changing stream conditions that affect the snake's habitat. The PDM plan describes specific monitoring triggers where certain outcomes of monitoring will result in specific actions. The monitoring triggers (both quantitative and qualitative) are based on the snake's distribution, presence, reproduction, and abundance, as well as evaluation of instream flow conditions.

The PDM plan also includes annual reporting requirements. If PDM results in concern regarding the status of the snake or increasing threats, possible responses may include an extended or intensified monitoring effort, additional research (such as modeling metapopulation dynamics or assessing the status of the fish prey base), enhancement of riverine or shoreline habitats, or an increased effort to improve habitat connectivity by additional translocation of snakes between reaches. If future information collected from the PDM, or any other reliable source, indicates an increased likelihood that the species may become in danger of extinction, the Service will initiate a status review of the Concho water snake and determine if relisting the species is warranted.

More questions?

The final rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on October 27, 2011, and become effective on November 28, 2011. A copy of the final rule and other information about the Concho water snake is available on the Service's regional website at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/austintexas/>.

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