



News Release

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Albuquerque, NM 87103
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Contacts: Adam Zerrenner, (512) 490-0057, ext. 248
Lesli Gray, (972) 569-8588

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Recovery of the Concho Water Snake

Citing the effects of a multi-year conservation effort involving the Colorado River Municipal Water District and other partners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) 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.

“The ESA serves as a critical safety net for species that are threatened or endangered. The delisting of species such as the Concho water snake represents a conservation success achieved through the efforts of the Service and its partners.” said Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Regional Director for the Service’s Southwest Region.

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 ESA.

The Concho water snake is a reptile endemic to central Texas. This snake is small compared to most other water snakes, with adults rarely exceeding 3 feet in total length. It is a nonvenomous snake that 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 species has a light pinkish or orange belly that is unmarked or has somewhat indistinct spots along the sides.

The Concho water snake has a relatively short life that rarely exceeds five years. Although it breathes air with lungs, just like other snakes, it is never far from water. In rivers, the species 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.

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.

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. A long-term research study was funded by the Colorado River Municipal Water District (CRMWD) through cooperation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and carried out by scientists at Texas A&M University and Texas State University. These efforts allowed the Service and CRMWD to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding in 2008 that provides minimum reservoir releases at certain times to benefit the snake and calls for moving snakes between stream reaches to maintain genetic diversity.

The Concho water snake was listed as threatened on September 3, 1986, due primarily to threats of habitat modification and destruction. As a result of recovery efforts and increased understanding of the biology of the species, including distribution, survival in reservoirs, drought tolerance, and diet, the Service has determined that this species no longer meets the definition of threatened or endangered. The Service is required under the ESA to monitor the Concho water snake populations for at least five years after being removed from the list. The monitoring will be carried out in close cooperation with the CRMWD and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. These efforts will ensure the snake remains secure after it is removed from the federal list of threatened species.

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>, or by contacting 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.

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