

Peer Review Plan: Listing Decision for the Northern Mexican Gartersnake (*Thamnophis eques megalops*) and Narrow-headed Gartersnake (*Thamnophis rufipunctatus*)

About the Document

Title: The Service will remove these species from the candidate list. To remove these species from the candidate list means to propose them for listing as threatened or endangered or to prepare a not warranted finding. A listing proposal will include proposed critical habitat, if prudent and determinable. Following a listing proposal, a final listing determination will follow within statutory deadlines.

About the Peer Review Process

Estimated Peer Review Timeline: May 2013 – August 2013

Peer review process:

- If we move forward with a proposed listing rule, we will solicit comments from three or more independent peer reviewers with expertise in northern Mexican and narrow-headed gartersnake ecology. This scientific peer review will be held concurrently with the public review.
- Peer reviewers will not be asked to provide recommendations on the listing determination or designation of critical habitat. Peer reviewers may be asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document.
- Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:
 - Expertise in northern Mexican and narrow-headed gartersnake ecology.
 - Independence: Reviewers will not be employed by the Service. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service, if the government supports their work.
 - Objectivity: Reviewers will be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. The reviewers should be comfortable sharing their knowledge and identifying their knowledge gaps.
 - Advocacy: Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of these species under the Endangered Species Act.

- Conflict of Interest: Reviewers will not have any financial or other interest that conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.
- If we move forward with a final listing rule, we use the information received from the peer review in the final rule for listing and designating critical habitat for the northern Mexican gartersnake and narrow-headed gartersnake.
- The estimated start date of the peer review will be May 1, 2013.

About public participation

Our listing decision document will be made available to the public through news releases, direct mailings, and posting on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment if it is a proposed rule). If appropriate, the Service will implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final listing and designation of critical habitat following consideration of all comments received from the public and peer reviewers. This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

Contact

For more information, contact Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Office, at (602) 242-0210. Also see the northern Mexican gartersnake and narrow-headed gartersnake species profiles via the Service's Endangered Species website, at:

Northern Mexican Gartersnake: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/MexGartersnake.htm>

Narrow-headed Gartersnake:

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/N-HGartersnake.htm>

A copy of the final determination will be posted on these sites upon completion.