



News Release

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Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public Comment on Revised Proposed Critical Habitat for Two Southwestern Gartersnakes

PHOENIX, AZ on 4/28/2020 - The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has published revised proposed critical habitat designations for two threatened species of gartersnake native to Arizona and New Mexico, and is seeking public comments. The Service is accepting public comments through June, 29, 2020.

In the revised proposed rule, the Service recommends designating 27,784 acres of critical habitat for the northern Mexican gartersnake and 18,701 acres of critical habitat for the narrow-headed gartersnake. This recommended reduction from the 2013 proposed rule follows the consideration of the best available scientific information for areas identified within the critical habitat rule and reflects the areas that provide suitable habitat for these species.

Northern Mexican gartersnake and narrow-headed gartersnake populations have declined primarily from interactions with predatory, non-native species such as bullfrogs, crayfish, warmwater sportfish and brown trout. Drought and large-scale wildfires that diminish surface water or degrade streamside vegetation are also significant threats, particularly where they co-occur in the presence of non-native species.

This proposed critical habitat designation identifies areas that are particularly important to the conservation of these two gartersnakes, where actions of federal agencies or activities that require federal permit or funding must be analyzed to prevent the incidental adverse modification of their habitat. It does not mean no development can occur in these areas, only that federal agencies must consult with the Service if they are conducting, funding or permitting activities that may affect the species.

Projects or activities that occur on private land would not be affected by the proposed critical habitat unless they require a federal permit or funding.

Native aquatic ecosystems contain some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the Southwest. Their protection and conservation is an American value and critical to many species of aquatic

insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, waterfowl and other wildlife, as well as humans. It is the Service's responsibility to protect the two gartersnakes, manage threats from predatory nonnative species, and encourage healthy aquatic communities.

The public may submit comments [here](#) by searching docket number FWS-R2-ES-2020-0011.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is actively engaged with 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 visit our website.](#)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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