

MOUNT GRAHAM RED SQUIRREL
(Tamiasciurus hudsonicus grahamensis)

STATUS: Endangered (52 FR 20994; June 3, 1987) with critical habitat (55 FR 425, February 5, 1990).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Grayish-brown tree squirrel, tinged rusty or yellowish along the back. In summer, a dark lateral line separates the light-colored underparts from the grayer or browner sides. The ears are slightly tufted in the winter, and the tail is bushy. Its diet consists largely of conifer seeds, but also mushrooms, pollen and cone buds, cambium from conifer twigs, and sometimes bones and berries.

HABITAT: Inhabits montane conifer forests from spruce-fir to mixed conifer types above 2,438 m (8,000 ft) in elevation. During the winter, this subspecies depends on seed-bearing cones and mushrooms that it has stored at certain sites known as middens. These caches (or middens), usually associated with logs, snags, stumps, or a large living tree, are the focal points of individual territories. The number of occupied middens is used to determine a rough estimate of the number of resident squirrels in an area.

RANGE: Historical: Pinaleño Mountains in Graham County, Arizona.

Current: Found primarily at higher elevations in the Pinaleño Mountains in spruce-fir and old growth Douglas-fir forests.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Originally listed as endangered due to a reduction in range and habitat from forest fires, road construction, and other development, and possible competition with introduced tassel-eared squirrels. More recent threats include additional habitat loss from multiple insect and parasite infestations, catastrophic wildfires, and fire suppression activities all of which are caused or exacerbated by continuing drought.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: U.S. Forest Service, Coronado National Forest.

NOTES: Since 1999, mild winters and major irruptions of at least four insect species have significantly affected the spruce-fir forest on top of the Pinaleño Mountains. A new Recovery Team was formed in 2002 to address recovery of the squirrel. The draft Recovery Plan for the Mount Graham Red Squirrel, First Revision, was opened for public comment in May 2011. This draft is currently being finalized, and can be found online at http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Documents/SpeciesDocs/MGRS/MGRS_dRecov_Plan_Revision_Final_May2011.pdf.

Critical habitat is designated for the Mount Graham red squirrel in the following three areas of the Coronado National Forest, Graham County, Arizona: 1) Hawk Peak-Mount Graham Area, 2) Heliograph Peak Area, and 3) Webb Peak Area. The major constituent element is dense stands of mature spruce-fir forest.

The Mount Graham red squirrel is listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need by the State of Arizona.