



News Release

Arizona Ecological
Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Rd.
Suite 103
Phoenix, AZ 85021

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

<http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes>

For Release: Nov. 2, 2005

Contacts: Jeff Humphrey (602) 242-0210 or Elizabeth Slown (505) 248-6909

ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION FINALIZED FOR SOUTHWEST FISH

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed the Gila chub (*Gila intermedia*), a minnow native to southwestern streams, as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and designated 160 miles of spring-fed and perennial streams and headwaters in New Mexico and Arizona as critical habitat. The Service proposed listing the Gila chub with critical habitat in 2002 and is completing this action in compliance with a court deadline.

“We twice sought public input to our proposed rule making,” said Steve Spangle, Arizona Field Supervisor. “Since we published our proposal, the San Carlos Apache Tribe completed a fisheries management plan and the City of Safford, together with Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation, developed a plan which secures a Gila chub population. This allowed us to exclude Bonita Creek and the Blue River from critical habitat designation because they are adequately protected.”

Economic impacts for all Gila chub conservation efforts in the species’ current range, not just those exclusively associated with habitat designation, were estimated to range from \$1.5 and \$3.8 million annually, and include costs associated with the listing of the species under the ESA for the designated areas. Between \$227,000 and \$1 million of the annual projected costs were associated with the Blue River and Bonita Creek – both now excluded from critical habitat designation.

Almost two miles each of Cienega Creek (Pima County) and Spring Creek (Yavapai County) were excluded due to the potential economic impact of designating these segments. Possible 20-year cost impacts of nearly \$36 million from these two segments were significant and a highly disproportionate. These two areas bore more than half of the projected costs from the entire designation. These exclusions will not result in Gila chub extinction.

Historically the chub occurred throughout the Gila River basin in southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and northeastern Sonora Mexico. The Gila chub today is found in less than 15 percent of its historical range; only 29 isolated populations remain.

By the late 1800s, watersheds were in poor condition from overuse due to livestock grazing, mining, expanded irrigation for agriculture, and fire suppression. These activities led to such long-term habitat degradation that the impacts are still evident today. The fish faces additional threats from increased groundwater pumping, growing development pressures, and competition from non-native fish.

The Gila chub is a small-finned, deep-bodied, chunky, darkly-colored minnow adapted to low-flowing streams subject to seasonal droughts. Males reach 6 inches and females can exceed 8 inches in length. Gila chub are highly secretive, preferring quiet, deeper waters, especially pools.

The Service designated critical habitat for 24 headwater streams of seven rivers – Upper Verde, Agua Fria, Middle Gila, Upper Gila, Lower Santa Cruz, Lower San Pedro, and Babocomari drainages. The proposed designation includes a 300-foot riparian zone adjacent to each side of the river. The majority of Gila chub critical habitat is found on Federal lands. Of the total, 160 miles are lands managed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. No critical habitat was designated on tribal lands. 34 miles is private land. About 19 miles is on county land and state lands. Populations not covered in the critical habitat designation have other protections in place that safeguard the species, are found only in Mexico or are newly established. Areas crucial to a species survival can be left out of a critical habitat designation if sufficient management protections are in place

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands.

By definition, critical habitat also does not include developed areas that do not provide elements essential to the conservation of the survival of the species, even though these areas may lie within designated critical habitat boundaries. For example, paved roads, dikes, levees, diversion structures, railroad tracks, railroad trestles, water diversion canals outside of natural stream channels, cultivated agricultural land, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments would not be considered critical habitat.

The Endangered Species Act requires the Service to designate critical habitat on the basis of the best scientific data available, after taking into consideration the economic impact, and any other relevant impact, of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. The Service may exclude areas from critical habitat designation when the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of including the areas within critical habitat, provided the exclusion will not result in extinction of the species.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the Service, and state wildlife management areas.

The listing rule, economic analysis, and environmental assessment are available on the Internet at www.fws.gov/arizonaes or by contacting the Field Office Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951 (602-242-0210).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the

American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

-FWS-

NOTE TO EDITORS: A photo of the Gila chub and other supporting information are available on the Service's web site <http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes> and <http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes/Fish.htm>.