



# News Release

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## Service Reconsiders Designation of Critical Habitat and Recovery Planning for Jaguar

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), under provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), has reconsidered a prudency determination concerning the designation of critical habitat for the jaguar (*Panthera onca*) in the Southwest and finds that designation of critical habitat is now prudent. The Service is soliciting jaguar habitat information through March 15 to inform a critical habitat proposal anticipated by January 2011.

Additionally, the Service has re-evaluated its previous determination whether to develop a Service-led recovery plan for the jaguar and has concluded that a recovery plan for jaguars would benefit the species and contribute to their conservation.

“The Service is determined to use the best available information about listed or candidate species, especially when it will assist us in re-evaluating our past decisions and enhance protections that might lead to the recovery of species in peril.” said Benjamin Tuggle, the Service’s Southwest Regional Director.

The Act requires that, to the maximum extent prudent and determinable, the Secretary designate critical habitat at the time a species is determined to be endangered or threatened. According to Service regulations, designation of critical habitat is not prudent when one or both of the following situations exist: (1) The species is threatened by taking or other human activity, and identification of critical habitat can be expected to increase the degree of threat to the species; or (2) such designation of critical habitat would not be beneficial to the species.

The Service originally determined in 1997, and then again in 2006, that designating critical habitat for the jaguar was not prudent. Both of these decisions were challenged by The Center for Biological Diversity, a non-governmental organization based in Tucson, Arizona.

The District Court for the District of Arizona issued an opinion on March 30, 2009, requiring the Service to reevaluate the information supporting the previous not-prudent finding regarding critical habitat designation for the jaguar.

In light of parameters provided by the District Court of Arizona and consistent with our regulations, the Service has determined that habitat features used by jaguars can be identified in the U.S. and intends by January 2011 to develop a proposed determination of critical habitat after considering the best available scientific and commercial information.

We intend that any designation of critical habitat for the jaguar be as accurate as possible. Therefore, we will continue to accept additional information and comments from all concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party. A 60-day information gathering period will begin with publication of this announcement in the Federal Register and will close on March 15, 2010. To learn more about providing information, visit <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Jaguar.htm>.

The jaguar, a large member of the cat family (Felidae), is an endangered species that currently occurs from southern Arizona and New Mexico to southern South America. Jaguars in the United States are part of a population, or populations, that occur largely in Mexico.

Jaguars in the United States historically occurred in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and possibly Louisiana. The last confirmed jaguar sightings in California, Texas, and Louisiana were in the late 1800s or early 1900s. While jaguars have been documented as far north as the Grand Canyon, sightings in the United States from 1996 to the present have occurred mainly within approximately 40 miles or 64.4 kilometers of the United States–Mexico border.

Critical habitat is defined in the Endangered Species Act as the geographical area occupied by a species, at the time it is listed, where biological or physical features are essential to the conservation of the species and may require special management considerations or protection. Additionally, specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by a species at the time it was listed, if these areas are essential for the conservation of the species, can be considered as critical habitat.

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