



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)** [www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)

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## **Service Seeks Public Comment on Proposed Designation of Critical Habitat for Jaguar in Arizona and New Mexico**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced it will seek public comment on a proposal to designate critical habitat for the jaguar under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in portions of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. Jaguars in the U.S. are part of the northern range of a population that occurs in Mexico.

The areas the Service has identified as potential critical habitat was informed by the Recovery Outline for the jaguar that was recently completed by a Service-assembled, binational team of scientists. The team relied on a scientific population viability analysis and a population and habitat viability analysis for the jaguar in the northern extent of its range in Mexico and the U.S.

On March 30, 1972, the Service listed the jaguar as endangered outside of the U.S. in accordance with the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969. On July 22, 1997, the Service published a final listing rule that extended endangered status for the jaguar into the United States.

The critical habitat proposal follows a ruling in the Arizona District Court that the Service's previous finding, that designation of critical habitat for the jaguar in the United States would not be prudent, was not legally sufficient.

The Service has identified 838,232 acres in six units in primarily mountainous portions of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico that will be considered for potential critical habitat. These include 547,000 acres of Federal land; 111,741 acres of State of Arizona land; 76,329 acres of Tribal land; and 103,143 acres of private lands. Critical habitat designations have no effect on actions taking place on non-federal lands unless proposed activities involve federal funding or permitting. When this proposal publishes in the *Federal Register*, a 60-day public comment period will begin.

The proposed critical habitat, which includes areas occupied at the time of listing, as well as areas essential to the conservation of the species, is located in Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise Counties, Arizona, and Hidalgo County, New Mexico. The Service has defined occupied areas as those containing both an undisputed jaguar record at the time of listing and the habitat features required

by the jaguar, and essential areas to be those that provide connectivity between occupied areas in the U.S. and Mexico. The Service is seeking comments and information regarding this proposal, including information on how to better understand and characterize the essential habitat features for jaguars in the U.S., as well as special management considerations or protection that may be needed to maintain them.

The Service is also seeking comments from independent specialists to ensure that the proposed critical habitat designation is based on scientifically sound data, assumptions, and analyses. The Service has invited these peer reviewers to comment on the specific assumptions and conclusions used to develop the critical habitat proposal. Because the Service intends that the final determination be as accurate and effective as possible, comments or information from other concerned government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning this proposed rule is also requested.

To ensure that the possible economic impacts of the proposed designation are considered as required under the ESA, the Service is preparing a draft economic analysis. The analysis will be used to inform the development of the final designation of critical habitat for the jaguar. If the Service determines that the designation of any given areas would cause unacceptable economic or other impacts, such areas could ultimately be excluded from the final designation. The Service will publish an announcement and seek public comments on the draft economic analysis when it is completed.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. 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. Critical habitat designation does not impose restrictions on private lands unless federal funds, permits, or activities are involved. Federal agencies that undertake, fund, or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure that such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before October 19, 2012. For more information on this proposal, how and where to submit comments, and the types of information the Service is seeking, go to <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Jaguar.htm>. Requests for a public hearing must be submitted within 45 days, on or before, October 4, 2012.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. The Service is working to actively engage 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 <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfws](http://www.twitter.com/usfws), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws>.*

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