



Questions and Answers: Mount Graham red squirrel and Little Colorado spinedace 5-year Review

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

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What action is the Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

The Service will undertake a 5-year review for the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel and the threatened Little Colorado spinedace. Under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), the Fish and Wildlife Service is required to conduct a review of listed species at least once every 5 years.

What is the Mount Graham red squirrel and where is it found?

The Mount Graham red squirrel is a grayish-brown tree squirrel with a rusty or yellowish back that exists only as an isolated, relatively small population in the conifer forests on the Pinaleno Mountains in Graham County, Arizona. The quantity and quality of its habitat continues to decline due to long-term drought and destruction from insect epidemics and fire events. The Mount Graham red squirrel's recovery plan is also being revised at this time.

What is the Little Colorado spinedace and where is it found?

The Little Colorado spinedace is a small (less than 4 inches) minnow known historically from the East Clear Creek watershed, Chevelon, Creek, and Rudd creeks, and the mainstem Little Colorado River. Recent surveys have been unable to locate the fish in Silver Creek, very few were found in Nutrioso and Rudd creeks, and the fish are considered rare in the East Clear Creek watershed, Chevelon Creek, and the mainstem Little Colorado River. Long-term drought and current and planned water acquisitions are limiting the amount of water available for the fish. Additionally, non-native fish and crayfish continue to compete with spinedace and are predators upon them.

What is a 5-year review? / What does a 5-year review entail?

A 5-year review is an assessment of each listed species to determine whether its status has changed since the time of its listing such that it should be classified differently than its current status or delisted. The purpose of a 5-year review is to ensure that listed species have the appropriate level of protection under the ESA.

The 5-year review will consider the best scientific and commercial data regarding the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Little Colorado spinedace, particularly any information that has become available since their original listing determinations. Such information includes:

- species biology including, but not limited to, population trends, distribution, abundance, and demographics, and genetics;
- habitat conditions including, but not limited to, amount, distribution, and suitability;

- conservation measures that have been implemented that benefit the species;
- threat status and trends;
- other new information, data, or corrections including but not limited to changes in taxonomy or nomenclature, identification of erroneous information contained in the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; and improved analytical methods.

The review also will assess: a) whether new information suggests that each species is increasing, declining, or stable; b) whether existing threats are increasing, unchanged, reduced, or eliminated; c) if there are any new threats; and d) if any new information or analysis calls into question any of the conclusions in the original listing determination as to the species' classification.

Who is responsible for doing a 5-year review?

The Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce are ultimately responsible for conducting the 5-year reviews of listed species. This responsibility has been delegated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries to assess the species for which they have jurisdiction.

Why is the Service doing a 5-year review for the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Little Colorado spinedace now?

The Mount Graham red squirrel was listed in 1986 and the Little Colorado spinedace was listed in 1987. Research and monitoring programs for these species have been carried out and are ongoing. As a result, new information has become available. Although this information has been made public, and the Service has continued to use the best available information under its ESA responsibilities, the 5-year review affords us the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the full body of information now available regarding the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Little Colorado spinedace as required by the ESA's 5-year review provisions.

Why haven't we done a 5-year review for the Mount Graham red squirrel or the Little Colorado spinedace before?

Given our limited resources to accomplish a multitude of high priority workload issues such as our section 7 consultations, habitat conservation planning efforts, and backlog of recovery planning needs, we have relied on other processes to assess the status of listed species.

In addition to the requirement for review of listed species every 5 years, there are other requirements of the ESA and other processes under which we do this kind of assessment. Section 4(f)(3) of the ESA requires us to report every 2 years to Congress on the status of efforts to develop and implement recovery plans for all listed species, and on the status of all species for which recovery plans have been developed. In addition, we annually assess the status of each listed species as a measure of our progress in achieving our goals under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (31 U.S.C. 1115). Although the ESA and other processes require us to assess the status of all listed species periodically, our practice is to monitor the status of listed species on a continual basis. We do this as part of recovery planning and implementation efforts, our consultation process with other Federal agencies under section 7 of the ESA, our permitting program under section 10 of the ESA, our petition process under section 4 of the ESA, and other activities related to listed species.

What is the outcome of a 5-year review?

The Service will make a recommendation whether or not a change in the Federal classification of the Mount Graham red squirrel or the Little Colorado spinedace is warranted. Possible recommendations include that

the classification should be changed from endangered to threatened (for the squirrel), threatened to endangered (for the spinedace) or a recommendation that one or both species no longer need(s) protection and should be delisted, or a recommendation that the classifications should remain the same. If the Service recommends that a change in classification is warranted, the agency may propose to reclassify or delist a species. If the agency does propose a change, it would go through a formal rule-making process, including public review and comment, as defined in section 4(a) of the ESA. No change in classification would occur until the completion of that rulemaking process.

What happens if new scientific information is presented during the public notice period?

Our analysis of new information received during the public notice period may indicate that a change in the Mount Graham red squirrel or the Little Colorado spinedace classification is warranted. Changes may include delisting or down-listing from endangered to threatened or reclassified from threatened to endangered, but any change would occur only through a formal rule-making process, including public review and comment, as defined in section 4(a) of the ESA. No change in status of the species may occur until that process is complete.

How does the Service determine whether a species is endangered or threatened?

Under the ESA, the term “endangered species” means any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The term “threatened species” means any species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Section 4(a)(1) of the ESA establishes that we determine whether a species is endangered or threatened based on one or more of the following five factors:

- (a) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
- (b) Over utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- (c) Disease or predation;
- (d) The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or
- (e) Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

Our assessment of these factors is required, under section 4(b)(1) of the ESA, to be based on the best scientific and commercial data available.

When will the 5-year review of the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Little Colorado spinedace be completed?

The review will take approximately one year to complete. However, in order to assure sufficient time for analyzing and responding to new information, the comment period will close on April 11, 2006.

What information is the Service seeking after announcing the review?

The notice solicits information from the public about the species' status. The Service is soliciting new scientific or commercial information from the public, including new information that has become available since the species' listings. Such information may include but is not limited to: species biology; population trends, distribution, abundance, demographics and genetics; habitat conditions (amount, distribution, and suitability); conservation measures; impacts to the species and trends; and any other new information, data, or corrections such as taxonomic or nomenclature changes, identification of erroneous information contained in the list, and improved analytical methods.

Information submitted should be documented with maps, bibliographic references, methods used to gather and analyze the data, and/or copies of any pertinent publications, reports, or letters by knowledgeable

sources. We will consider all information submitted, but raw data that has not been analyzed or summarized may have limited usefulness.

How do I submit information to be considered in the review?

Information may be submitted in writing to: Field Supervisor, Attention 5-year Review, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021. Information may also be faxed to (602) 242-2513 or to (602) 242-0210. Please include “Attention 5-year Review” in the title line for faxes.

When should information be submitted?

In order to allow the Service adequate time to consider information, it must be received no later than April 11, 2006.

Will submissions be available to the public after the review?

Information received in response to this notice, and review results, will be available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours at the above Service address.

Who should I contact for more information about the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Little Colorado spinedace?

Contact: For the Mount Graham red squirrel, contact Thetis Gamberg at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tucson Sub-Office, 201 North Bonita, Suite 141, Tucson, AZ 85745, 520-670-6150 x 231, thetis_gamberg@fws.gov. For the Little Colorado spinedace, contact Shaula Hedwall at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Arizona Ecological Services Flagstaff Sub-Office, 323 North Leroux, Suite 101, Flagstaff, AZ 86001, 928-226-0614 x 103, shaula_hedwall@fws.gov.