



# News Release

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[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)

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## **CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR TWO RARE SOUTHWEST FISHES**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today re-designated critical habitat in New Mexico and Arizona for the spikedace and loach minnow under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Both fishes have been protected as threatened species under the ESA since 1986.

The Service designated 522 miles of rivers and streams and a 300-foot buffer extending from each bank as critical habitat for the two species. This includes portions of the Gila, San Francisco, Blue, Black, Verde, Lower San Pedro rivers and Aravaipa Creek and some tributaries in Apache, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Pinal, and Yavapai counties in Arizona, and Catron, Grant, and Hidalgo counties in New Mexico. Much of the mileage overlaps between the two species.

In New Mexico, 167.7 federal stream-miles, 1.3 state stream-miles and 82.5 private stream-miles have been designated. In Arizona, 170.4 federal streams miles, 8 state stream-miles, 2.1 tribal stream-miles and 90.2 private stream-miles have been designated.

On Dec. 20, 2005, the Service proposed to designate 633 stream miles as critical habitat. After completing a draft economic analysis of the conservation costs for the two fishes in the proposed area and receiving fisheries management plans from tribes and Phelps Dodge Corporation, a total

of 110.3 miles of the Verde River, all tribal lands, and Phelps Dodge holdings on Eagle Creek and the Gila River were excluded from the final designation.

“In 2005, we identified and proposed to designate as critical habitat those stream stretches that are essential to the conservation of these fishes. Since then, Phelps Dodge stepped up and agreed to monitor and conserve the spikedace and loach minnow populations on their land holdings,” said Steve Spangle, Arizona Field Supervisor for the Service. “Our economic analysis revealed that Verde Valley communities would bear a disproportionate cost for the conservation of the spikedace. Once we determined that excluding the middle Verde River would not lead to the species’ extinction, we were able to exclude that area. The final rule now identifies the habitat essential to these two fishes while providing local control to those who have accepted the responsibility to conserve habitat.”

The spikedace is silver-sided and the loach minnow is olive-colored (males are brilliantly colored during spawning) with upward-directed eyes. Both the spikedace and loach minnow are fewer than three inches long and require perennial streams, where they inhabit shallow water with moderate to swift currents. The spikedace and loach minnow are threatened by habitat destruction and introduction of nonnative aquatic species that compete with them. The occupied range of the two fish has diminished by an estimated 85-90 percent because of these threats.

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. It does not allow government or public access to private lands or limit public access to public or private

lands and waters. Federal agencies are required to consult with the Service for any activities they undertake, fund or permit that affect designated critical habitat.

Copies of the proposed rule, draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment are available online at [www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona) or by calling 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.

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