



News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

For Release: May 26, 2011

Contacts: Jeff Humphrey (602) 242-0210 x222 or Marit Alanen (520) 670-6150 x234

Fish and Wildlife Service to Update Road Map to Recovering the Endangered Mount Graham Red Squirrel

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, together with the Mount Graham Red Squirrel Recovery Team, has drafted a revised recovery plan for the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel – a subspecies protected under the Endangered Species Act. When completed, the recovery plan will help guide efforts needed to conserve the squirrel, and identify population and habitat goals to determine when the subspecies has successfully recovered and can be removed from the list of animals protected by the Act. The original Mount Graham red squirrel recovery plan was developed 18 years ago and is outdated given the subspecies' current status and threats. The Service is soliciting comments on the draft revised plan and new information on the status of the Mount Graham red squirrel.

The Mount Graham red squirrel exists only in the upper-elevation forests of the Pinaleño Mountains in southeastern Arizona. Threats to the subspecies at the time of listing in 1987 included its small population size and range; changes in forest age structure and density within the squirrel's habitat; loss of habitat due to development, road construction, and forest fire; and competition with the introduced Abert's squirrel. These same threats to the red squirrel's habitat continue today, compounded by the additional threats of climate change (including drought), insect infestation, and fire-suppression activities. Recent research also indicates that predation, competition with Abert's squirrels, and demographic factors (mainly due to its small population size) may impact the Mount Graham red squirrel population more than previously expected.

The goal of the revised recovery plan is to assure the long-term viability of the Mount Graham red squirrel in the wild, allowing initially for reclassification (downlisting) to threatened status and, ultimately, removal (delisting) from the list of endangered and threatened wildlife. Recovery plans provide guidance and do not obligate the Service or potential partners to undertake the measures described in them.

The draft revised recovery plan proposes new downlisting and delisting criteria based on maintaining and increasing population numbers and habitat quality. The revised recovery plan focuses on protecting and managing the remaining population and habitat, restoring and creating habitat to allow for the existence of a viable and robust population, researching the conservation biology of the Mount Graham red squirrel in order to facilitate efficient recovery, developing support and building partnerships to facilitate recovery, monitoring progress toward recovery and practicing adaptive management.

The *downlisting* objectives are to restore and maintain a forest mosaic of at least 70 percent of the range (13,838 acres) of the Mount Graham red squirrel and a 10-year (5 squirrel generations) population increase at a rate of at least 20 percent of the known population. Since 2001, the population has fluctuated between approximately 200 and 300 squirrels.

The *delisting* objectives are to restore and maintain a mosaic of at least 80 percent of the range (15,815 acres) and stabilize or increase the population for at least a 20-year period following downlisting. The draft plan notes that the date of recovery for the Mount Graham red squirrel is unknown at this time. Forest habitat regeneration is a long-term process. Several recovery actions will take at least 50 years to see results and 100 to 300 years may be needed to fully restore Mount Graham red squirrel habitat.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species.

Persons wishing to review the draft revised recovery plan can obtain a paper or electronic copy from the Arizona Ecological Services Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951; by phone at (602) 242-0210; or from the Internet at www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/. Written comments and materials pertaining to the draft revised recovery plan may be mailed to "Field Supervisor" at the address above or emailed to MGRSrecovery@fws.gov. To ensure that comments are considered, they should be received no later than July 26, 2011.

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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Photographs of the Mount Graham red squirrel are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210) or on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Mammals.htm> and http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/natdiglib&CISOPTR=5682&CISOBX=1&REC=3.