



# 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 Determines That the Desert Massasauga May Warrant Federal Protection as Endangered or Threatened**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), announced today the results of a 90-day status review on a petition to list desert massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus edwardsii*), a rattlesnake found in the southwestern United States, as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Based on this review, the Service found that the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing desert massasauga may be warranted. The desert massasauga is a rattlesnake (Family Viperidae) classified as a subspecies of massasauga.

The Service will open a 60 public comment period and initiate a review of the status of this subspecies to determine if listing is warranted. The Service is requesting scientific and commercial data and other information regarding this subspecies. Based on the extended status review, the Service will issue a finding on the petition, which will address whether the petitioned action is warranted. Comments should be received by October 9, 2012.

You may submit information by one of the following methods:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2012-0057.

(2) *By hard copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2012-0057; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will not accept emails or faxes, and will post all information received on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that any personal information you provide will be posted.

The Service was petitioned to add the desert massasauga to the list of threatened and endangered species in November 2010. Per a separate settlement agreement with the petitioners, the Service has scheduled its Endangered Species Act listing program workload through 2016, so it does not anticipate completing a status assessment and finding whether the desert massasauga warrants listing until after 2016.

Desert massasauga is gray to light brown, with 37 to 40 darker brown saddles or semicircular blotches, outlined in black, forming a regular pattern on the dorsal surface. A prominent dark brown to black stripe extends from the eye to the angle of the jaw, and a lyre-shaped or paired irregular set of stripes extends from the dorsal surface of the head to the first body blotch. The base of the rattle on the tail is typically black, but in young snakes, the tip is yellow. The desert massasauga is relatively small compared to other rattlesnakes, reaching a maximum adult total length of 23 inches, with an average length of about 15 inches.

The desert massasauga is venomous, and the venom, used to acquire prey, is toxic to humans. However, due to its small adult size, venom yields are low, and bites to humans, although potentially serious, are not likely to be life-threatening.

The desert massasauga occurs in a variety of grassland and shrubland habitats, including shortgrass prairie, sandsage grasslands, shinnery oak, Chihuahuan desert, and occasionally sand dune habitat. The snake uses grasses for capturing prey and avoiding predators, as these areas provide protective cover. The subspecies is not often found in scrub or shrub habitats in most parts of its range.

The range of desert massasauga is reported with some variation in published accounts, but the subspecies is known to occur from central-western and southern Texas, southeastern Colorado, southern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona, and northern Mexico. Historically, the snakes may have occurred in far western Oklahoma and extreme southwestern Kansas contiguous with the range in Colorado, but their present occurrence in both States is unknown.

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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