



News Release

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ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION PROPOSED FOR THREE FORKS AND SAN BERNARDINO SPRINGSNAILS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a proposal to protect the Three Forks springsnail and San Bernardino springsnail under the Endangered Species Act. A comprehensive review of the status of the two springsnails, based on the best available scientific and commercial data, indicates that protecting the species as endangered throughout their range in Arizona is appropriate. Six localized critical habitat units – totaling about 13 acres – are also proposed. The Service is seeking comments on the proposed rule through June 13, 2011.

“The Three Forks and San Bernardino springsnails face significant threats throughout their limited ranges. We’re seeking comments on this proposed listing so that we can best focus management priorities on these snails, ultimately resulting in their recovery,” said Steve Spangle, Arizona Field Supervisor.

The Three Forks springsnail faces threats primarily from predation by nonnative crayfish and habitat degradation caused by elk grazing. Additionally, fire-retardant drift likely resulted in the near extirpation of the Three Forks springsnail from half of its known range. The Three Forks springsnail was historically distributed in at least two separate spring complexes, Three Forks springs and Boneyard Bog springs in the North Fork East Fork Black River Watershed of the White Mountains in Apache County, east-central Arizona. Currently, only Boneyard Bog supports a robust healthy population. Critical habitat designation is proposed for 11 acres of the two spring complexes.

The San Bernardino springsnail, facing threats primarily from groundwater pumping and introduction of pesticides into its habitats, may have been extirpated from greater than 50% of its historical range. The historical range of the San Bernardino springsnail in the U.S. is believed to have included at least eight populations within springs along the headwaters of the Rio Yaqui on lands now within the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge and the John Slaughter Ranch.

One of the last known refuges of the San Bernardino springsnail has gone intermittently dry over the past few years due to groundwater pumping. The species is currently limited to three springs, Snail Spring, Goat Tank Spring and Horse Spring on the John Slaughter Ranch, Cochise County, Arizona. Critical habitat designation is proposed for 0.8 acres on San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge and 1.2 acres on the three springs at the John Slaughter Ranch.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Critical habitat can include areas not occupied by the species if those areas are found to be essential for the conservation of the species. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The Service will prepare a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat designation that will be released for public review and comment at a later date.

Comments on the proposed rule can be submitted electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov> or by mail to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket FWS-R2-ES- 2009-0083; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Ste. 222, Arlington, VA 22203. Requests for additional information or supporting documents can be submitted to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951; phone 602/242-0210 or fax 602/242-2513.

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