



News Release

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Federal Habitat Protection Proposed for Sonoyta Mud Turtle

-Critical habitat proposal for sole U.S. population-

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing critical habitat designation for the Sonoyta mud turtle under the Endangered Species Act. The proposed critical habitat designation is limited to 12 acres of the turtle's occupied habitat at Quitobaquito on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The proposal will provide habitat protection of the subspecies' sole location in the United States. Despite the Sonoyta mud turtle's additional range, south of the national monument across the Mexican border, federal critical habitat designations can be made only in the United States. A 60-day public comment period on the proposed critical habitat designation and an associated draft economic analysis will begin upon publication of the proposal in the *Federal Register* December 6, 2018.

The Service utilized a robust Species Status Assessment (SSA) of the Sonoyta mud turtle's current and predicted future condition. The assessment results led to adding this subspecies to the list of endangered species in September 2017, and the current proposal to designate critical habitat.

The Sonoyta mud turtle is a less than six-inch aquatic turtle with an olive brown to dark brown upper shell (carapace) and a hinged lower shell (plastron). Long barbels (whisker-like organs) are typically present on the chin, and its feet are webbed. The subspecies is closely related to the more populous and widely distributed Sonora mud turtle.

The Sonoyta mud turtle is an isolated subspecies, localized in the Rio Sonoyta basin in Arizona and Sonora, Mexico – an extremely arid environment. Sonoyta mud turtles require aquatic habitat to survive, and use terrestrial habitat for nesting, moving between intermittent sources of water, and estivating during drought. There are five known remaining populations of Sonoyta mud turtle – one in the U.S. at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona and four in Sonora, Mexico. These populations occupy less than 20 percent of the subspecies' historical range.

The Service will accept comments on the critical habitat proposal through February 4, 2019. For more information on the Sonoyta mud turtle, the critical habitat proposal, draft economic analysis, and how to submit comments, visit <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>.

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Note to editors: Photographs, a range map and other visual support are available by contacting Craig Springer at 505-248-6867 craig_springer@fws.gov