



News Release

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Rare, Pocket-sized, Arizona Turtle to Receive Endangered Species Act Protection

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the Sonoyta mud turtle is in danger of extinction throughout its range along the U.S.-Mexico border, and has listed it as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service based its determination on a robust Species Status Assessment (SSA) of the Sonoyta mud turtle's current and predicted future condition, and peer review of its 2016 proposal to list the subspecies. The listing and protection will become effective on October 20, 2017.

“The Sonoyta mud turtle is clearly in danger of extinction,” said Steve Spangle, the Service’s Arizona Field Supervisor. “Protecting it under the Endangered Species Act will marshal increased attention and the resources needed by our U.S. and Mexican conservation partners to improve and expand its dwindling habitat and populations.”

The Sonoyta mud turtle is an aquatic turtle less than six-inches long 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 and Rio Guadalupe basins in Arizona and Sonora, Mexico – an extremely arid environment. Sonoyta mud turtles require aquatic habitat to survive, but use wetted riparian habitat for nesting, moving between intermittent sources of water, and estivating (prolonged dormancy) during drought. Today, there are five known remaining populations of Sonoyta mud turtle – one at Quitobaquito Springs in 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 most significant stressors for the Sonoyta mud turtle are the loss of aquatic and riparian habitat related to agricultural and municipal groundwater pumping, and long-term drought, which affect the amount of surface water and subsurface moisture available for the Sonoyta mud turtle. Reductions in riparian habitat further decrease shade, needed for nesting sites and as drought refuge for hatchlings, juvenile and adult turtles. Reduction in aquatic habitat also affects the invertebrate prey and space available for mud turtles.

The Quitobaquito Springs population is the most resilient of all the remaining Sonoyta mud turtle populations. The National Park Service continues to implement actions to stabilize the water levels in

the pond there. The interagency Quitobaquito Rio Sonoyta Work Group is currently implementing conservation actions for this population in the U.S, as well as other populations in Mexico. This group includes the National Park Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, private citizens and the Service. Species experts that are members of the group served as peer reviewers of the species status assessment.

The Service has not proposed to designate critical habitat for the Sonoyta mud turtle at this time.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled or at-risk 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, as well as keep common species, common. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/Endangered/>.

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.

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Note to editors: Photographs, a range map and other visual support are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey at 602-242-0210 x222 (jeff_humphrey@fws.gov) and visiting <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Reptiles.htm> .