



News Release

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Service Designates Critical Habitat for Endangered Sonoyta Mud Turtle in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is designating 12.28 acres of critical habitat for the endangered Sonoyta mud turtle within Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Southern Arizona. The critical habitat is entirely within the monument, which is home to one of five remaining populations of the tiny turtle, which was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 2017. The other four populations are in Sonora, Mexico.

This science-based critical habitat designation will help protect water resources that will benefit not just the mud turtle and wildlife that share its habitat, but local communities that also rely on healthy, reliable water resources.

“We are working closely with many dedicated partners, including the National Park Service, to address the threats facing the Sonoyta mud turtle,” said Service regional director Amy Lueders. “This critical habitat designation is an essential component of our joint conservation efforts.”

While the Sonoyta mud turtle is highly aquatic and depends on permanent water for its survival, the area where it occurs in Arizona is one of the driest regions in the American southwest. Loss and degradation of stream habitat from groundwater pumping and drought, along with its very limited distribution, are the primary threats to the turtle.

Conserving and recovering the Sonoyta mud turtle will require diverse collaborations between the Service, federal agencies, Arizona, private landowners and others. The National Park Service is implementing actions to stabilize the water levels in the pond at Quitobaquito Springs.

However, water use in the Rio Sonoyta continues to impact the turtle.

The [Quitobaquito and Rio Sonoyta Working Group](#), composed of federal and state agencies, local universities, museums, conservation groups and private citizens, is also working to protect the mud turtle and countless other species that share its habitat.

Designation of critical habitat ensures that actions of federal agencies do not harm habitat deemed critical for the species. It means that federal agencies must consult with the Service if they are conducting, funding or permitting activities that may adversely modify Sonoyta mud turtle critical habitat. 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.

The final rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on June 23, 2020.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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