



# News Release

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## **Sharpnose Shiner and Smalleye Shiner Protected Under the Endangered Species Act**

The sharpnose shiner and smalleye shiner – two minnows native to the arid prairie streams of Texas – are in danger of extinction, and are being listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. Along with the final listing decision, the Service is also designating approximately 623 miles of the Upper Brazos River Basin and the upland areas extending beyond the river channel by 98 feet on each side as critical habitat for the two fish in the Texas counties of Baylor, Crosby, Fisher, Garza, Haskell, Kent, King, Knox, Stonewall, Throckmorton and Young. The two shiner species have been candidate species since 2002.

Once found throughout the Brazos River and several of its major tributaries within the watershed, the shiners are currently restricted almost entirely to the contiguous river segments of the Upper Brazos River Basin in north-central Texas. This represents a reduction of the smalleye and sharpnose shiners' historical ranges of more than 50 and 70 percent, respectively.

“We carefully considered the comments received from peer reviewers and the public on the shiner proposals, and our decisions reflect the best available science,” said Michelle Shaughnessy, Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services in the agency’s Southwest Region. “The Service is committed to continuing to work with the local communities, landowners and water management districts to conserve the shiners and the Brazos River. A healthy Brazos River benefits not only the species, but also helps to ensure the continued vitality and way of life for the communities that are dependent upon it.”

The two primary factors affecting the status of shiners are river fragmentation and alterations of the natural stream flow regime (caused by dams, groundwater withdrawal, saltcedar encroachment and drought). Other factors, such as water quality degradation and commercial harvesting for fish bait, likely also impact these species, but to a lesser degree. These multiple factors act together to lower the overall viability of the species.

The shiners are short-lived, with a maximum lifespan of approximately three years (although many live through only one breeding season), and both species require wide, shallow, unobstructed flowing waters to survive, grow and reproduce.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA 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. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or 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 rules will publish in the *Federal Register* on August 4, 2014, and become effective 30 days after publication. More information is available online at [www.fws.gov/southwest/es/ArlingtonTexas/Shiner.htm](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/ArlingtonTexas/Shiner.htm) or by contacting Debra Bills, Field Supervisor, Arlington Ecological Services Field Office, 2005 Northeast Green Oaks Blvd, Suite 140, Arlington, TX, 76006; telephone 817-277-1100. Those who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

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