



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)** <http://southwest.fws.gov>

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## **Service Announces Draft Conservation Agreements to Aid the Texas Hornshell**

*Agreement Would Benefit Other Species and Provide Certainty to Landowners in N.M. and Texas*

Landowners and managers in southeast New Mexico and the Trans-Pecos region of Texas have agreed to restore, maintain and create riverine habitat for five native animals and are inviting neighbors to participate. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), is announcing the availability of a draft Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA), draft Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) and draft environmental assessment for the Texas hornshell and four other aquatic species that are found in west Texas and southeastern New Mexico. The Texas hornshell, a four-inch mussel, has been proposed for federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection. A 30-day public comment period will begin upon publication of the Notice of Availability.

The Center of Excellence (CEHMM) and the New Mexico State Land Office (NMSLO) submitted applications for an “enhancement of survival permit” under the ESA that includes the draft CCA and draft CCAA. If approved the CCA, CCAA and enhancement of survival permit would be in effect for 30 years and cover conservation activities that take place on Federal and non-Federal lands in the Black and Delaware Rivers in Eddy County, N.M. and Culberson County, Texas for known populations of the Texas hornshell, as well as the Rio Grande River cooter, gray redhorse, blue sucker and Pecos springsnail – which share habitat and conservation benefits with the Hornshell. All five are state protected species.

CCAAs are voluntary and provide non-federal landowners and developers the opportunity to implement conservation practices that address specific threats with assurances that, if the species is listed, they can continue to manage their land as outlined in their agreements with no additional requirements. Federal agencies, permittees and lessees can enter into CCAs. Although there are no assurances associated with CCAs, enrollees have a high degree of certainty that they will not be subject to increased land use restrictions if the species is listed.

Once abundant throughout rivers in southern New Mexico and the Rio Grande basin in Texas and Mexico, the Texas hornshell has experienced a dramatic decline. Today, it is the only native mussel remaining in New Mexico and is scarce in Texas, occupying only 15 percent of its historical U.S. range. Habitat fragmentation and loss as a result of impoundments and reduced water quality and

quantity are negatively impacting the Texas hornshell and other freshwater mussels across the Southwest. After thoroughly reviewing the best available science, on August 10, 2016, the Service proposed to protect the hornshell as endangered under the ESA.

The Service encourages the public to review and provide comments on the documents during the 30-day public comment period. Written comments must be received by August 7, 2017. Information on how to obtain or review copies of these documents, or how to provide comments can be found [here](#).

If approved, CEHMM and NMSLO will assist interested area landowners, lessees and developers with enrollment in the CCAA. For information, contact CEHMM (575-885-3700) or NMSLO (505-827-5760).

The Service's priority is to make implementation of the ESA less complex, less contentious and more effective. We seek to accelerate recovery of threatened and endangered species across the nation, while making it easier for people to coexist with these species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <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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