



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

Southern and Central California Coast

Frequently Asked Questions

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposes to reclassify Morro shoulderband snail as threatened species under the ESA

What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks information, data, and comments on a proposal to reclassify the Morro shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta walkeriana*) from an endangered to a threatened species and a proposed 4(d) rule for the tailored conservation of the species.

Along with the proposed reclassification for the Morro shoulderband snail, the Service evaluated the status of the Chorro shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta morroensis*) and determined that it does not meet the definition of a threatened or endangered species under the ESA. The Service sought expert opinions regarding the species status assessment, and their comments helped inform our determination.

What led to this proposed reclassification?

The proposed reclassification is due to a reduction in threats to the Morro shoulderband snail, which has occurred predominantly from protection of lands formerly at risk of development and survey results that indicate that the number of individuals is now in the thousands rather than the hundreds.

Habitat protection and other conservation efforts by partners such as the California Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Morro Coast Audubon Society, Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, County of San Luis Obispo, and community of Los Osos have been beneficial to the Morro shoulderband snail.

At the time of listing in 1994, we believed that as few as several hundred Morro shoulderband snails remained within their geographic range in and around the City of Morro Bay and community of Los Osos. Recent monitoring surveys associated with the Los Osos Wastewater Project within a limited portion of the species' range have revealed the presence of at least 2,200 individuals. Other lands within the range of the species are known to be occupied by Morro shoulderband snail; however, we have less information on the total number of individuals present in these areas.

At the time of listing of the Chorro shoulderband snail we believed the species was extinct. Shortly after listing, the species was rediscovered near the northern limit of Morro Bay. Since the rediscovery, individuals have been documented at other locations from northern Morro Bay south, and inland through the City of San Luis Obispo. Survey data from 2017 reveals that species' presence and distribution is similar to data at the time of rediscovery, indicating that species' threats have not resulted in population-level declines, nor do we anticipate them to do so in the foreseeable future.

What threats remain to the snails?

While conservation efforts have done much to help the Morro shoulderband snail, the Service has determined the snail still faces the risk of becoming endangered in the future. Some of the threats identified at the time of listing, particularly off-road vehicle activity, competition from brown garden snails, and parasitism by flesh fly species are no longer affecting the snail; however, habitat loss and degradation from fragmentation associated with development and invasive plant species, wildfire, and changing climate conditions are the most significant remaining threats.

Like the Morro shoulderband snail, habitat loss and degradation is a common threat to the Chorro shoulderband snail. However, survey data conducted in 2017 reveals that species' presence and distribution is similar to data at the time of rediscovery. This indicates that threats to the species have not resulted in population-level declines, nor do we anticipate them to do so in the foreseeable future.

What are some general characteristics of the Morro and Chorro shoulderband snails, their habitat, and threats to species recovery?

Both snails are terrestrial species endemic to San Luis Obispo County on California's central coast. The Morro shoulderband snail's range is limited to approximately 6,500 acres in and around the community of Los Osos and the City of Morro Bay. The Chorro shoulderband snail's distribution covers a much wider area, extending from the coastal community of Cayucaos through the Los Osos Valley and east of the City of San Luis Obispo.

The snails, often not much larger than a quarter, feed on decaying plant material and spend the majority of the year in a hibernation-like state. Most of their feeding, reproduction, movement and growth occurs during California's rainy season, which typically occurs during the months of October through April.

Current threats to both snail species are primarily those associated with land use practices that eliminate, reduce, fragment and/or modify the species' habitat. A changing climate will likely intensify the severity of some of these threats.

What is the difference between an endangered and a threatened species?

An endangered species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A threatened species is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant part of its range.

Will protections for the Morro shoulderband snail change after this reclassification to a threatened species?

All of the protections of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are provided to endangered species. The Service has the authority to determine which of these protections should apply to each threatened species. It does so through applications of special rules under section 4(d) of the Act.

Section 4(d) of the Act directs the Service to issue regulations deemed "necessary and advisable to provide for the conservation of threatened species." The Service uses 4(d) rules to provide an

incentive for beneficial conservation actions and to streamline the regulatory process for actions that would result in little negative impact to species recovery.

The proposed 4(d) rule for the Morro shoulderband snail would exempt from the prohibitions of the Act habitat restoration activities that would contribute to the recovery of the species or activities that minimize the risks of severe wildfire that could eliminate populations of Morro shoulderband snail.

Will protections for the Chorro shoulderband snail change as a result of the status assessment determination?

Species not listed under the Endangered Species Act do not warrant the protections of the Act. We believe that threats to the Chorro shoulderband snail will not substantially affect species population levels, nor do we anticipate them to in the foreseeable future.

How can people submit their comments?

The 60-day comment period begins July 24, 2020. Interested parties can submit their comments electronically or by U.S. mail on or before 11:59 p.m. September 22, 2020.

Electronically: Visit <http://www.regulations.gov> and search for docket number FWS-R8-ES-2019-0025.

U.S. mail: Send your comments to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R8-ES-2019-0025 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22401-3803.

Requests for public hearings must be received, in writing, by September 8, 2020: Send your requests for a public hearing to Stephen P. Henry, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, CA 93003.

What type of information is the agency seeking during the public comment process?

The Service intends that any final action resulting from this proposed rule and proposed 4(d) rule for the Morro shoulderband snail is based on the best scientific and commercial data available. Therefore, we request comments or information from other governmental agencies, tribes, the scientific community, industry, and other interested parties concerning these determinations. We particularly seek comments concerning:

1. Reasons why we should or should not reclassify the Morro shoulderband snail from an endangered to a threatened species under the ESA;
2. New biological or other relevant data concerning any threat (or lack thereof) to the species;
3. New information on efforts by the State or other entities to protect or otherwise conserve the species;
4. New information concerning the range, distribution, and population size or trends of the species;
5. New information on current or planned activities in the habitat or range that may adversely affect or benefit the species; and
6. Information on activities or areas that might warrant being exempted from the section

9(a)(1) take prohibitions proposed in this rule under section 4(d) of the Act. The Service will evaluate ideas provided by the public in considering the extent of prohibitions that are necessary and advisable to provide for the conservation of the species.

What happens next?

Before making a final decision, the Service will evaluate information provided by the public during the comment period. Based on that information we may modify the proposal in the final rule.