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## **Service Proposes to Protect the Florida Bonneted Bat Under the Endangered Species Act**

*Agency Seeks Information from the Public, Scientific Community before Making Final Decision*

Current evidence suggests that the Florida bonneted bat is in danger of becoming extinct in the foreseeable future, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. As a result, the Service has proposed to protect the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and is seeking new information from the public and the scientific community that will assist the agency in making a final determination.

The Florida bonneted bat is a species of mammal that is restricted to south and southwest Florida, with the core range primarily consisting of habitat within Charlotte, Lee, Collier, Monroe, and Miami-Dade Counties. Recent data also suggests use of portions of Okeechobee and Polk Counties and possible use of areas within Glades County. The Florida bonneted bat is a large, non-migratory, insectivorous, free-tailed bat and is the largest bat in Florida. The species uses forests, wetlands, and other natural habitats. It also has been recorded in residential and urban areas. At present, no active, natural roost sites are known. All known roost sites are artificial structures (bat houses).

This bat, previously known as the Florida mastiff bat, was identified by the Service as a formal candidate for ESA protection in 2009, due to the threats posed by ongoing habitat loss and alteration, inadequate regulatory mechanisms, and a wide array of natural and human factors, including: low population size, restricted range, low fertility, random events (e.g., hurricanes, prolonged cold events), removal or displacement by humans, and potential impacts from pesticide applications (exposure and impacts to its foraging base). It is unclear to what extent the species' historical range has been reduced. However, the species continues to experience habitat loss due to land use conversions caused by population growth, conversion of forests to other uses, routine land management activities, removal of artificial structures, and effects of climate change, including sea-level rise.

The final decision to add the Florida bonneted bat to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants will be based on the best scientific information available. The Service opened a 60-day public comment period today to allow the public to review and comment on the proposal and provide additional information. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties will be considered and addressed in the agency's final listing determination for the species.

Today's decision is part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan that resolves a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA Listing Program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce litigation-driven workloads and allow the agency to focus its resources on the species most in need of the ESA's protections over the next five years.

Comments should be submitted by one of the following methods:

(1) Electronically: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Keyword box, enter Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2012-0078, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on "Send a Comment or Submission."

(2) By hard copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2012-0078; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received on or before December 3, 2012.

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