

December 18, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ken Warren, ken_warren@fws.gov, 772-469-4323 (o), 772-643-4407 (c)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to List Miami Tiger Beetle as Endangered

VERO BEACH, Florida – The Miami tiger beetle was considered extinct until 2007, when a small population was discovered near Zoo Miami. Now the distinctive beetle with a shiny dark green back is only known to survive in two separate, very small populations in Miami’s disappearing pine rocklands—one in the Richmond Pine Rocklands and another discovered this year a few miles from there and separated by urban development.

Because of the Miami tiger beetle’s rarity and the threats its remaining pine rockland habitat faces from urban development pressures, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comment on its proposal to list the Miami tiger beetle as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The proposal is expected to publish Tuesday, December 22, in the Federal Register with a 60-day comment period that should end February 22, 2016, and a public hearing scheduled for January 13, 2016.

At the same time, the Service is seeking more information through this announcement related to its biology, distribution, and threats including development and collection before it determines whether to propose critical habitat. A decision on that is not expected until next fall. The rare pine rocklands within the Richmond area are home to seven other species of plants and animals already protected under the ESA. These include the Florida leafwing and Bartram’s scrub-hairstreak butterflies, Florida bonneted bat, and four plants including Florida brickell-bush, Carter’s small-flowered flax, deltoid spurge, and tiny polygala.

“The Miami tiger beetle is in trouble because it has only survived in increasingly rare urban pine rockland habitat,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service’s Southeast Regional Director. “Its remaining habitat faces huge urban development pressures.”

As has been widely reported, there are proposals to build developments called Coral Reef Commons and Miami Wilds on these lands. Plans for the proposed large developments have yet to be finalized, and the lands have not been fully surveyed for the beetle.

Miami tiger beetles need bare or sparsely vegetated, sandy habitat patches that are found within pine rockland habitat to survive. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation have destroyed about 98 percent of the historical pine rockland habitat in Miami-Dade County, and the ever-present threat of habitat loss is continuing from development, inadequate habitat management resulting in vegetation encroachment, and environmental effects from climatic change.

Collection, restricted range, and few, small populations are other significant threats for the beetle.

The Service began a review of the Miami tiger beetle's status and threats in early 2014. In December 2014, the Service received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity, the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, South Florida Wildlands Association, Tropical Audubon Society, and some individuals requesting that the Miami tiger beetle be emergency listed as endangered and that critical habitat be designated under the Endangered Species Act.

If the Miami tiger beetle is listed as endangered, federal agencies would be required under the Endangered Species Act to consult with the Service and consider the effects to the species before taking an action including funding, authorizing or carrying out land development or management. Private-sector businesses are encouraged to work with the Service to develop a Habitat Conservation Plan if their proposed project would adversely affect the beetle. The purpose of a Habitat Conservation Plan is to allow for certain types of development when adequate conservation measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the species are included.

In this pine rocklands area, for example, the Service has met with representatives of Ram and the University of Miami, who have development interests in this area. The Service is currently reviewing a draft Habitat Conservation Plan that includes an Incidental Take Permit Application for projects they are seeking to move forward. Completion on this process and final decisions on both are not expected before spring 2017.

The public is invited to submit comments on the Service's proposal to list the Miami tiger beetle through February 22, 2016, 60 days after its publication in the *Federal Register*.

Written comments can be submitted by one of the following methods:

(1) Electronically: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R4-ES-2015-0164, 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 "Comment Now!"

(2) By hard copy: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R4-ES-2015-0164; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

All comments will be posted on <http://www.regulations.gov>

To provide the public an opportunity to learn more about the proposed listing of the Miami tiger beetle and submit comments in-person, the Service will hold a public hearing on January 13, 2016, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus, Building 6000, Room 6120, 11011 SW 104th Street, Miami, Florida, 33176. Service staff will be available to

answer questions about the proposal during an informal informational session from 5:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Ken Warren, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Florida Ecological Services Office, 1339 20th Street, Vero Beach, Florida, 32960; by telephone 772-469-4323; or by facsimile 772-562-4288 or e-mail: ken_warren@fws.gov. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

For more information about the Miami tiger beetle and the Service's proposal to list it under the ESA, please visit www.fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/insect/miami-tiger-beetle

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and 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 www.fws.gov/southeast. Connect with us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws>, and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.

-FWS-