

Frequently Asked Questions

Florida Bonneted Bat Proposed Critical Habitat

Q: Why is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposing to designate critical habitat for the Florida bonneted bat?

A: The Florida bonneted bat was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on October 2, 2013. According to the ESA, critical habitat can be designated, if prudent and determinable, for any species determined to be endangered or threatened. The proposed critical habitat for the bat would help preserve the essential physical and biological features it needs for survival.

Q: What does a critical habitat designation mean?

A: Critical habitat, as defined by the ESA, is a specific geographic area that contain features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species that may require special management and protection. Critical habitat may include areas that are not currently occupied by the species but are essential for its conservation.

Q: Where are the areas being proposed for critical habitat designation and how much land is being proposed?

The proposed critical habitat areas cover a total of approximately 1.5 million acres located in 10 counties across South and Central Florida. The counties are Charlotte, Collier, De Soto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Lee, Miami-Dade, Monroe and Sarasota. These areas are made up of four units, all of which partially overlap with areas that have already been designated as critical habitat for 20 other listed species.

Q: How do these proposed designations affect private landowners and developers?

A: Designating critical habitat under the ESA does not affect private landowners unless they implement an action involving federal funds, permits or activities. It does not affect land ownership, nor establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area, nor does it allow the government or public to access private lands.

Additionally, when determining these proposed critical habitat boundaries, the Service made every effort to avoid including large areas of agriculture or developed areas such as lands devoid of native vegetation or covered by buildings, pavement and other structures. Also, over 80% of the proposed area is within conservation lands, and some of the land being proposed for the designation is already designated as critical habitat for six other species.

Q: Does critical habitat designation affect all activities that occur within the designated area?

A: No. Critical habitat designation does not necessarily restrict activities but federal agencies must make special efforts to protect the important characteristics of these areas. Only activities that involve a federal permit, license or funding, and are likely to destroy or adversely modify the area of critical habitat will be affected. If this is the case, the Service will work with the agency and, where appropriate, private or other landowners, to amend their project to allow it to proceed without adversely affecting the critical habitat. Thus, most federal projects are likely to go forward, but some will be modified to minimize harm to critical habitat.

Q: Which other threatened or endangered species are found on the lands being proposed for critical habitat for Florida bonneted bats?

A: Some of Florida’s most well-known species can be found on these lands including Florida panthers, wood storks, eastern indigo snakes, snail kites, Florida scrub jays, Miami tiger beetles, red-cockaded woodpeckers and pine rocklands plants.

Q: Are the lands being proposed for critical habitat designation occupied or unoccupied by Florida bonneted bats?

A: All four of the proposed units are occupied. Below is a chart of Florida bonneted bat proposed critical habitat units, including unit occupancy, hectares (ha) and acres (ac) by land ownership type. Note: WMA = Wildlife Management Area.

Unit	Occupancy/ Presence	Ownership	Area (ha (ac))
<i>Proposed Critical Habitat Units</i>			
Unit 1—Peace River and surrounding areas	Occupied		
		State	4,537 (11,212)
		County	119 (295)
		Local	13 (32)
		Private and Other	14,087 (34,810)
		Unidentified	793 (1,960)
		Total	19,550 (48,310)
Unit 2—Babcock-Webb WMA, Babcock Ranch, and surrounding areas	Occupied		
		Federal	1 (3)
		State	61,128 (151,050)
		County	3,724 (9,203)
		Local	8 (21)

Unit	Occupancy/ Presence	Ownership	Area (ha (ac))
		Private and Other	32,001 (79,077)
		Unidentified	642 (1,587)
		Total	97,505 (240,941)
Unit 3—Big Cypress and surrounding areas	Occupied		
		Federal	250,733 (619,573)
		Tribal	10,527 (26,012)
		State	61,869 (152,882)
		County	3,384 (8,362)
		Local	173 (427)
		Private and Other	38,227 (94,460)
		Unidentified	1,920 (4,745)
		Total	366,833 (906,462)
Unit 4—Miami-Dade natural areas	Occupied		
		Federal	71,385 (176,395)
		Tribal	326 (805)
		State	26,159 (64,639)
		County	4,210 (10,404)
		Local	114 (281)
		Private and Other	11,496 (28,408)
		Unidentified	683 (1,688)
		Total	114,372 (282,620)
GRAND TOTAL			598,261 (1,478,333)

Q: How did the Service determine what areas to designate as critical habitat?

A: Biologists considered physical and biological features the species needs for survival and reproduction. These include:

- space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;
- cover or shelter;
- food, water, air, light, minerals or other nutritional or physiological requirements; and
- sites for breeding, reproduction, rearing of offspring, germination or seed dispersal.

Q: What does the draft economic analysis mean to private landowners in the area?

A: The economic analysis (EA) is comprehensive and considers the economic costs of adding this regulatory designation. The EA found that the proposed designation would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small business entities and/or private landowners.

Q: How long does the public comment period last? What's the next step after it ends?

A: The Service is particularly interested in comments concerning the amount and distribution of Florida bonneted bats and their habitat, what may constitute physical or biological features essential to the bat's conservation, suitability of proposed areas and other areas which may meet the definition of critical habitat and the draft economic analysis. At the conclusion of the comment period, the agency will begin the process of reviewing the comments and decide whether or not to pursue this proposal in the form of a final rule.

The Service will accept comments regarding the proposed rule or draft economic analysis that are received or postmarked on or before August 10, 2020. Comments submitted electronically using the [Federal eRulemaking Portal](#) must be received by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on the closing date. The agency must receive requests for public hearings, in writing, at the address shown below by July 27, 2020.

You may submit comments on the proposed rule or draft economic analysis 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-2019-0106, 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-2019-0106; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike; Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

Comments should be sent only by the methods described above. The Service will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that any personal information provided may be available to the public.