

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Washington Fish and Wildlife Office  
510 Desmond Dr., SE  
Suite 102  
Lacey, WA 98503-1263

# News Release



Contact: Doug Zimmer 360/753-4370  
For Release: October 11, 2012

## **Service Proposes to Protect Streaked Horned Lark under the Endangered Species Act** *Agency Seeks Information from the Public, Scientific Community Before Making Final Decision*

Current evidence suggests that the streaked horned lark may become threatened with extinction 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, and is seeking new information from the public and the scientific community that will assist the agency in making a final determination.

The Service also is proposing a special rule to exempt the “take” or harm of streaked horned larks associated with civilian airport maintenance and operation, and agriculture management. The exemption means anyone engaged in those permitted activities would not be held responsible if the activities harm members of the subspecies.

The streaked horned lark, a subspecies of the horned lark, is found exclusively in western Washington and Oregon. It is a ground-nesting bird that is found in open conditions, sparsely-vegetated areas in the Willamette Valley and on Puget Sound prairies, on sandy islands in the Columbia River and along the Washington coast.

The Service first identified the streaked horned lark as a candidate for ESA protection in October, 2001, due to the threat posed by the loss or degradation of prairie ecosystem, sandy islands and coastal habitats due to conversion to agriculture, commercial and residential development, dominance by invasive species, and forest encroachment resulting from a variety of causes, such as lack of periodic fire. The species’ historic range has been significantly reduced and it continues to experience habitat loss due to the same threats.

Service biologists have also identified approximately 12,159 acres in western Washington and Oregon that may contain grassland habitat essential to the conservation of the species. Of the total acreage identified, 21 percent is located on state lands, 42 percent on federal lands, 35 percent on private and other lands, and 2 percent on Tribal lands.

The ESA requires the Service to identify the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species, which the Act terms “critical habitat.” This identification helps Federal agencies identify actions that may affect listed species or their habitat, and to work with the Service to avoid or minimize those impacts.

Identifying this habitat also helps raise awareness of the habitat needs of imperiled species and focus the conservation efforts of other partners such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individual landowners.

Although non-federal lands have initially been included in these areas, activities on these lands are not affected now, and will not necessarily be affected if the species is protected under the ESA in the future. Only if an activity is authorized, funded or carried out by a federal agency will the agency need to work with the Service to help landowners avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts to listed species or their identified habitat.

Today's proposal 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.

The final decision to add the streaked horned lark to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, as well as the final identification of areas containing habitat essential to the species, will be based on the best scientific information available. In addition, the Service will utilize an economic analysis to inform and refine its identification of this habitat. Only areas that contain habitat essential to the conservation of the species and where the benefits of this habitat outweigh potential economic impacts will be included in the final identification.

The Service will open a 60-day public comment period on October 11, 2012, 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 and identification of habitat essential to its conservation.

A copy of today's proposal and other information about the subspecies involved is available at <http://www.ofr.gov/inspection.aspx> . or on the USFWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/>. Following publication in the Federal Register, links to the document may be found at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse.collection.action?collectionCode=FR>. The proposal is open for public comment for 60 days. Comments may be sent electronically through the Federal eRulemaking portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Submit your comments to Docket No. FWS-R1-ES-2012-0080. You may also submit hard copy comments by U.S. Mail or hand delivery to: Public Comments Processing; Attn: FWS-R1-ES-2012-0080; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS2042-PDM, Arlington, VA 22203. All comments must be received by December 10, 2012.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

**-FWS-**