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News Release



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Mazama Pocket Gopher Listing Decision Delayed up to Six Months *Public Comment Period Re-opened*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the final determination whether or not to list four subspecies of Mazama pocket gophers for protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) will be delayed for up to six months.

The extension will allow the agency time to address issues raised during previous comment periods. Today's action also opens a 45-day public comment period on the proposed listing, an associated proposal to designate critical habitat for the subspecies, and an associated 4(d) special rule. The four subspecies are the Roy Prairie, Olympia, Tenino, and Yelm pocket gophers.

The extension for the final determination will give the agency time to address concerns raised by state and federal agencies, local municipalities and the agricultural community over the sufficiency or accuracy of existing data used to make the original listing and critical habitat proposals and to formulate the associated special rule.

"We are committed to ensuring that any final determination is based on the best available scientific and commercial data," said Ken Berg, Manager of the USFWS Washington State Office. "We continue to make every effort to make this the best science-informed decision possible."

In a concurrent action, the Service announced it is removing five other subspecies of Mazama pocket gopher from consideration for ESA protection. One of the five subspecies is considered extinct (Tacoma pocket gopher: *T.m. tacomensis*), another was found to be a taxonomic error (Brush Prairie pocket gopher: *T.t. douglasii*), and three (Olympic pocket gopher: *T.m melanops*, Cathlamet pocket gopher: *T. m. louiei*, Shelton pocket gopher: *T. m. couchi*) do not face sufficient threats to warrant protection.

Comments may be submitted online at the Federal Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> .The docket numbers for the proposed actions are FWS–R1–ES–2012–0088 (for listing) or FWS–R1–ES–2013–0021 (for designation of critical habitat). Comments may also be sent by U.S. mail to: Public Comment Processing, ATTN: (cite appropriate docket number), Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM, Arlington, VA 22203. Comments will be accepted through 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, October 18, 2013.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at 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>

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