

NEWS BULLETIN  
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**Date:** April 8, 2014

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## **Four Subspecies of Mazama Pocket Gopher to be Protected under the Endangered Species Act**

*Special rule created to assist landowners in conserving species*

After years of close collaboration with local landowners, state biologists, federal agencies and other partners to implement significant conservation measures, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced a path forward in the protection of four subspecies of Mazama pocket gophers. The Service will list the four subspecies as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (Act) with additional provisions that recognize farmers, ranchers and the Department of Defense for their conservation efforts to date.

The subspecies – the Olympia (*Thomomys mazama pugetensis*), Roy Prairie (*T. m. glacialis*), Tenino (*T. m. tumuli*), and Yelm (*T. m. yelmensis*) pocket gophers – are found only in Washington State in Thurston and Pierce counties. A threatened species is one that is likely to become endangered throughout all or a significant portion of its range in the foreseeable future.

“The Service has been working with partners for some time to build a broad base of community support for prairie species in general and Mazama pocket gophers in particular as important species in the prairie landscape,” said Ken Berg, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Washington Fish and Wildlife Office manager. “Conserving prairies helps sustain the counties’ natural and

farming heritage while ensuring the continuation of key military operations. This arrangement is an innovative, efficient use of taxpayer resources.”

Along with the listing rule, the Service announced its designation of 1,607 acres in Thurston County as critical habitat for the Olympia, Tenino and Yelm subspecies of the Mazama pocket gopher. The Service also finalized a special rule under section 4(d) of the Act that allows for continued agricultural activities on farming and ranching lands.

Research on pocket gopher activity in Thurston County by the Washington State departments of Agriculture and Transportation found evidence of existing populations of Mazama pocket gophers in areas with agriculture activity. This research provided key data the Service used to complete the special rule.

“Washington state farmers and ranchers have long been committed to the protection of the environment, not just because their livelihood depends upon it, but because they truly care about the land,” said Bud Hover, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture. “Most also understand that government oversight is sometimes necessary, only asking that decisions affecting the agriculture industry be based on the best available science. I’m pleased that our efforts to work with state and federal partners provided data that helped inform this decision.”

All critical habitat proposed for the Roy Prairie pocket gopher in Pierce County is located on the Joint Base Lewis-McChord military base. The base has worked with the Service on a management plan that conserves the habitat of these gophers while still allowing military training operations to continue. As a consequence, the land on the base has been exempted and there is no final critical habitat for this subspecies.

Colonel Charles Hodges, Joint Base Commander at JBLM, said, “We are committed to conserving the prairie species and maintaining quality habitat. Through coordination with the Service, we were able to meet the needs of wildlife while avoiding constraints on our mission critical training. Our collaboration was key in reaching this goal.”

Basic threats to the Thurston/Pierce subspecies of the Mazama pocket gopher include habitat loss through conversion and degradation of habitat, particularly from development and the spread of woody plants; and from other factors such as predation and fragmentation into small or isolated populations.

"We have such a unique environment here in Thurston County that we share a special responsibility to save the last of our prairies," said Karen Valenzuela, Chair of the Thurston County Board of Commissioners. "The prairies are important in their own right, but it's especially important when you consider that they provide habitat to a disappearing species."

"In the South Puget Sound area," Berg said, "prairies are our heritage, both cultural and natural. Every species, like every farm or ranch, counts in keeping the integrity of that heritage intact."

More information on this decision is available online at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) and [www.fws.gov/wafwo/mpg.html](http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/mpg.html). Comments and materials we received, as well as some supporting documentation we used in preparing this final rule, are available for public inspection at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), Docket No. FWS-R1-ES-2013-0021.

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov), or connect with us through any of these social media channels:*



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