



# News Release

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Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) <http://southwest.fws.gov>

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## **Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to Remove Snake from Endangered Species Act Protection**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the Concho water snake should be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species. The proposed rule, published in today's *Federal Register*, has a comment due date of September 8. The snake inhabits portions of the Colorado and Concho Rivers in central Texas.

The Service uses five factors to determine if a species merits protection under the Endangered Species Act and reviews the factors again when recommending a species be removed from the list. The factors are: (A) the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; (B) overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (C) disease or predation; (D) the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or (E) other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence. In particular, comments are sought concerning the range, distribution, location and size of population and current or planned activities in the area and their possible impacts on the species.

The information gathered will aid in the Service's final decision as to whether the Concho water snake should no longer be considered a threatened species. "Our science suggests the snake does not need ESA protection," said Benjamin N. Tuggle, Ph.D. Regional Director for the Service's Southwest Region. "We look forward to receiving any and all biological information during our comment period. Our final decision will reflect the best available science."

The proposal to delist the water snake is based on a recent review of the current status of the population and the known threats to the snake's survival. Research suggests that some threats to the species are not as serious as previously thought when the snake was listed as threatened in 1986. Surveys have shown that the snake uses reservoirs, it persists in low stream flow conditions better than was predicted and it has a slightly larger range than was known at the time of listing.

Major threats to the snake at the time of listing included habitat loss and fragmentation from construction of a proposed dam, impoundments, inadequate instream flows, siltation of riffles and pollution. The proposal explains how the threats have diminished or are no longer considered significantly impacting the snake.

Earlier this year, the Service entered into a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Colorado River Municipal Water District to ensure that stream flows would be maintained in the Colorado River to provide habitat for the Concho water snake, even if it is removed from the threatened list.

The proposal is available on the web at [www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Library](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Library) (search under Concho water snake) or request a copy from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Field Supervisor, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758.

Comments can be submitted electronically at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) or by mail to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket FWS-R2-ES-2008-0037; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Ste 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

The non-poisonous Concho water snake has a relatively short life that rarely exceeds five years. Although it breathes air with lungs, just like other snakes, it is never far from water. It emerges from hibernation in mid-March to mid-April and seeks out mates. Births occur from late July through September and the average litter is 11. Females give birth to young in streams, rivers and reservoirs. Since females do not reproduce until age two or three the number of reproductive opportunities is often limited to only two or three seasons. The newly born snakes stay in shallow water near rocks for both cover and for seeking small fish to eat. In rivers, the Concho water snake is mainly found in or near riffles while in reservoirs, snakes are usually found in rocky areas near the habitats associated with schools of small fishes, such as shallow, silty areas with submersed vegetation.

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).

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