



News Release

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Critical Habitat Proposed for Threatened Devils River Minnow

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reopened its comment period on the proposed designation of critical habitat for the rare Devils River minnow found in streams in Val Verde and Kenney Counties. An economic analysis has been drafted and is now available for public review.

A meeting to discuss the critical habitat designation and its supporting documents has been scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 27 in Del Rio at the Kennedy Room, Del Rio Civic Center, 1915 Veterans Blvd. The meeting begins with an informational session from 6 to 7 p.m. and the public hearing runs from 7 to 8 p.m.

The draft economic analysis estimates the costs of federal agencies consulting on minnow conservation efforts in the proposed designated areas to be less than \$30,000 annually. The document is available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/> or by calling 512-490-0057, ext. 237.

The public is welcome to comment on the agency's draft documents either at the hearing, via the internet or by mail. For electronic submission, follow the instructions for submitting comments at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Comments may be mailed to Public Comments Processing, Attn: RIN 1018-AV25; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. The deadline for all comments is March 10.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of designating it, the Secretary of the Interior may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless that would jeopardize the existence of a threatened or endangered species. Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The Service proposes designating 47.5 miles of rivers and streams as critical habitat for the species. The stream segments being proposed for critical habitat designation are largely rural within privately owned ranches, except for the portions of San Felipe Creek (owned by the City of Del Rio and local private entities), and a small segment of the Devils River within the Devils River State Natural Area (owned by the State of Texas and managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department).

The Devils River minnow is a small fish (usually less than three inches) with hatched markings along its sides and lateral line that extends through the upper lip. The species only lives in spring-fed streams of the western Edwards Plateau in Texas that are tributary to the Rio Grande. The species requires perennial streams of clean flowing water where they inhabit shallow areas with moderate to swift currents. They use gravel bottoms to deposit their eggs for spawning and are most often found in association with aquatic vegetation – presumably for cover to avoid predators.

The species did occur in two other streams in Kinney County: Las Moras Creek (where it has not been found since the 1950s) and Sycamore Creek (where it has not been found since 1989).

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.

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