

Candidate Conservation around the Nation

Candidate Conservation under the Endangered Species Act

Candidate species are species for which the Fish and Wildlife Service has sufficient biological information to indicate that listing is warranted.

As of December 31, 1999, 264 plant and animal species were candidates for listing. Another 56 species proposed for listing can benefit from candidate conservation actions.

Through the candidate conservation program, the Service works cooperatively with States, territories, Federal agencies, and the private sector to conserve candidate species.

Early conservation action is important because:

- simple, cost-effective conservation options may still be available;
- conservation is likely to be successful;
- listing may be avoided; and
- property owners can maintain flexibility in land management.

The Service uses both Candidate Conservation Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances to work with partners to conserve species. In some cases, conservation has precluded the need to list.

Assessing Candidate Species

Bog Asphodel Conservation

For example, the Service is working with the State of New Jersey to assess the status of bog asphodel, a plant that is a candidate species. Using Geographic Information System technology to identify unprotected areas that may contain potentially suitable habitat, the partners are systematically field-checking to search for previously undocumented occurrences of the plant.



The Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection are developing a conservation agreement for the bog asphodel, a plant species that is a candidate for listing. Main threats to the bog asphodel are encroachment of woody vegetation that shades the open wetlands the species requires, suppression of natural wildfires that retard succession or create open wetland savannahs, and degradation of wetlands by off-road vehicles. Photo by Annette Scherer/USFWS

The Service and the State are developing a conservation agreement to restore habitat for the candidate species. Information that biologists develop from the assessment will guide habitat restoration. Restoration will feature removing encroaching woody vegetation and abating threats from incompatible recreational activities—from four-wheel drive vehicles, for example, which trample or rut wetlands, as well as create unvegetated travel corridors that erode and cause a siltation problem in the adjacent wetlands.

Candidate Conservation Agreements

Through Candidate Conservation Agreements, the Service works with its partners to identify threats to candidate species, plan measures needed to stabilize and conserve them,

identify willing landowners, develop and implement conservation measures, and monitor their effectiveness. Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances assure non-federal landowners that they can continue agreed-upon activities even if the species becomes listed in the future.

Catlow Valley Fish Conservation Agreement

In the Catlow Valley of Oregon, a conservation agreement developed with the Roaring Springs Ranch illustrates that

livestock management can be consistent with recovering streams and riparian systems and the wildlife that depends on them. The ranch joined the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Burns District of the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service in a conservation agreement for the Catlow tui chub and Catlow Valley redband trout. Since the ranch includes a substantial portion of headwater areas and streams, it is a key factor in improving the status of these fish. In responding to a petition to list the Great Basin redband trout as threatened or endangered, the Service determined that listing was not warranted for reasons such as the habitat improvements that resulted from the conservation agreement in the Catlow Valley.

In 1999, the owners of Roaring Springs Ranch, the Sanders Family, and the ranch's managers, Stacy and Elaine Davies, received the Conservation Achievement Award from the Western Division of the American Fisheries Society. The conservation agreement also received recognition recently as one of the 1998-99 "Model Projects" of Governor John Kitzhaber's Eastern Oregon Ecosystem Health and Restoration Strategy.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog Conservation Actions

Eight Great Plains States have joined to develop a rangewide black-tailed prairie dog Conservation Assessment and Strategy. Each individual state is working on specific management plans. The Service is also working with ranchers and farmers from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, and Wyoming, along with State natural resources agencies, to conserve the black-tailed prairie dog, a candidate species.

In Oklahoma and New Mexico, the Service and private landowners are implementing Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances for the black-tailed prairie dog and the lesser prairie-chicken. Partners across the prairie dog's Great Plains range include the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana, the Cheyenne River Sioux in North Dakota, and the Rosebud Sioux in South Dakota.

Spotted Frog Candidate Conservation Agreement

Through a conservation agreement, the Utah Reclamation, Mitigation, and Conservation Commission is striving to restore natural flow to a highly channelized 10-mile stretch of the Middle Provo River between Jordanelle Dam and Deer Creek Reservoir; the historic home of the largest population of spotted frogs along Utah's Wasatch Front. The work is being accomplished as part of the mitigation for the Jordanelle Dam project which, as originally planned, would have removed or destroyed the wetlands in this reach of the river.

Consultation with the Service and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources resulted in the Commission's avoiding or minimizing impacts to spotted frog and its habitat, aligning the river to avoid the best habitat, designing 8 new wetland ponds for spotted frog use, and supplying water year-round to the Jordanelle wetland ponds at the upstream end of the project. Adding to habitat along the Middle Provo River; the effort is likely to increase spotted frog numbers.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances

In June 1999, the Service finalized the Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances policy, expanding on the success of traditional agreements by assuring landowners that they can continue agreed-upon activities even if the species becomes listed. These assurances provide an incentive to non-federal landowners to participate early in conservation activities and help prevent the need for listing. Since the policy became effective, landowners are increasingly working with the Service to undertake conservation efforts for candidate species, and, in return, are receiving regulatory assurances.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances are under discussion for:

- Eastern massasauga, a rattlesnake, in several Midwestern States, including Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin;
- Robust redbhorse, a freshwater fish in Georgia;
- Southern torrent salamander and tailed frog in California;
- Gunnison sage grouse in Colorado;
- Black-tailed prairie dog in Oklahoma, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota; and
- Lesser prairie-chicken in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, and Kansas.



A scene of the lower end of Home Creek, one of the streams in Catlow Valley. Photo by Gina Lampman/ Bureau of Land Management

The redband trout is sometimes called the "jewel of the desert" for its sparkling quality in contrast with the harsh environment in which it lives. BLM photo



*Spotted frog, Wasatch County, Utah.
Photo by David A. Ross/USFWS*



Habitat for the Utah spotted frog. Utah Division of Wildlife Resources photo

High Plains Partnership

How can we save such species as the black-tailed prairie dog, mountain plover, swift fox, Arkansas River shiner, and the lesser prairie-chicken? By saving their High Plains habitat.

The High Plains Partnership brings together ranchers and farmers, conservation and producer organizations, State and Federal natural resources agencies, local governments, the Western Governors' Association, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in stewardship efforts in 10 States to benefit at-risk species of wildlife.

Under Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, landowners are assured that, if they implement actions such as, installing watering facilities, fencing, or replanting native vegetation to benefit candidate species such as the lesser prairie-chicken or the black-tailed prairie dog, they will not be required to implement further measures or be subject to additional restrictions on the use of their land or water if the species is listed. So far farmers and ranchers have undertaken these voluntary actions on 35,000 acres of private grasslands in Oklahoma and 16,000 acres in New Mexico to implement the High Plains Partnership.

"I thank the Fish and Wildlife Service for what it is doing to restore the lesser prairie-chicken, an important part of the landscape for generations," said an Oklahoma rancher who has a Candidate Conservation Agreement

with Assurances. "I just wish the project had begun a decade ago!"

The High Plains ecosystem of short-grass and mixed-grass prairies once encompassed more than 350,000 square miles in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. Today, much of the prairie has been converted to agriculture. The natural fire regime no longer exists, groundwater is being used faster than it can be recharged, and surface water is so depleted that many streams no longer flow. The goal of the partnership is to restore ecosystem health, while maintaining economic viability and keeping people on the land.

Under the Endangered Species Act's Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and the Landowner Incentive Program, farmers and ranchers have begun to improve habitat to benefit the lesser prairie-chicken and other High Plains species. Photo by John Shackford



The Landowner Incentive Program provided important start-up funds to begin achieving the goal. The program is so successful that more than 120 landowners have expressed interest in participating!

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances are designed to remove enough threats to the species to preclude the need to list them. An incentive to participate in these agreements, regulatory certainty is a key component of the High Plains Partnership.

Since 1966 mountain plover populations have declined by more than 60 percent to fewer than 8,000 birds, a warning sign that their grassland habitat is in trouble. USFWS photo

