



## Designating Dakota Skipper as a Candidate for Listing under the Endangered Species Act Questions and Answers

### 1. What is a Dakota skipper?

Dakota skippers are small to medium-sized butterflies with a wingspan of about one inch and hooked antennae. They occur only in high-quality, native tallgrass and mixed grass prairie from Minnesota to Saskatchewan and are presumed to be extirpated (made extinct) in both Illinois and Iowa. Dakota skippers are active as adults for only about 3 weeks in June and July. Eggs hatch in July and larvae (caterpillars) are active, eating native grass leaves until they enter dormancy in late summer and overwinter in shelters at or near the ground. They emerge in spring to continue development. Adults depend on habitats that provide sufficient nectar sources, such as purple coneflower, and sites for reproduction.

### 2. What is a candidate species?

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but whose proposed listing is precluded by other higher priority listing activities.

### 3. Why is the Service designating the Dakota skipper as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act?

Dakota skippers are found exclusively on remnant, high-quality native prairie habitats. Dakota skipper populations declined historically due to widespread conversion of native prairie for agricultural and other uses. This destruction has left only isolated fragments of native prairie, only some of which are managed in a manner that allows for the persistence of Dakota skipper. Many populations are threatened by overgrazing, conversion of their habitat to cultivated agriculture, inappropriate fire management and herbicide use, woody plant invasion, road construction, gravel mining, invasive plant species, and, in some areas, historically high water levels. If significant conservation actions are not implemented, Dakota skipper could be at risk of extinction throughout a significant portion of its range.

### 4. What protection is provided to candidate species?

Candidate species receive no legal protection under ESA. That is, there are no prohibitions against taking candidate species. The Service encourages and actively pursues conservation actions for candidate species with private landowners, state agencies, and other partners. If effective, these actions may eliminate the need to list the species as threatened or endangered. On the other hand, continued declines and increased threats to the species could hasten the listing of the species as threatened or endangered, at which point it would become legally protected under the Endangered Species Act.

### 5. What does candidate designation of Dakota skippers mean to a private landowner?

Designating the Dakota skipper as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act will not necessarily affect private landowners because the Act does not prohibit the taking of candidate species.

This designation, however, may increase funding available for landowners to protect native prairie and implement management practices beneficial to Dakota skippers and other native prairie species. Such practices may include native prairie restoration, rotational grazing systems, controlled burning, delayed haying, and integrated pest management to control leafy spurge.

## **6. Why are insects important to the environment and people?**

Insects are needed for plant pollination and provide food for a variety of wildlife species. Like other rare plant and animal species, insects are useful indicators of environmental quality. Dakota skippers, for example, can survive only on high-quality native prairie, one of North America's most endangered ecosystems, and are noteworthy components of the prairie's biological diversity.

## **7. How do species become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act?**

Identification of candidate species is a cooperative effort among the Service, other Federal and state natural resource agencies, local and tribal governments, business and industry, universities, conservation organizations and other private interests. If the Service determines that there is sufficient information on a species' biological status and threats to propose it as threatened or endangered it adds it to the list of candidate species. The lead Field Office for the species first makes the recommendation after reviewing and documenting the best available scientific and commercial information on the species. The Regional Office then forwards the recommendation to the Director of the Service, who then decides whether or not to concur with the recommendation. If the Director concurs, the species becomes a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered.

To guide the order in which species are listed, the Service assigns a listing priority from 1 to 12, based on the magnitude and immediacy of threats to the species and taxonomic considerations (for example, full species have higher priority than subspecies). The species' listing priority determines the order in which proposed listing rules are prepared, with the species at greatest risk (listing priority 1 through 3) being proposed first. The Dakota skipper listing priority number is 11.

## **8. Are there advantages to designating species as candidates for listing before adding them to the list of threatened or endangered species?**

Species become and remain official candidates for listing because funds available for listing species as threatened or endangered are not sufficient to list all of the eligible species at once. An effective program for conservation of endangered and threatened species requires a means to conserve species that are not yet listed, but face immediate, identifiable risks. Recovering species before they are listed under the Endangered Species Act may have greater management flexibility to stabilize or restore the species and their habitats. The Service's primary goal for candidate species is to remove or reduce threats so that it is no longer necessary to list it under the Endangered Species Act.

## **9. If the Service decides to go forward with listing the Dakota skipper as a threatened or endangered species, what is the process?**

The Service would prepare a document, called a proposed rule, that would be published in the Federal Register and made available for public review. The public would be given at least 60 days to review the proposal and provide us with any comments or additional information. During this 60 day period, we would notify the public that the proposal has been published and explain how to provide us with comments for our review before finalizing our decision. During this time interested individuals may also request public hearings. After the comment period ends, we would consider and analyze all the public comments and make a final decision on whether to list the species as threatened or endangered.

## 10. What can I do to help conserve the Dakota skipper?

- Contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (see below), your state natural resource agency, or non-governmental organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, if you are interested in finding out if Dakota skippers occur on your property and, if so, what options may be available to you to conserve the species and its habitat.
- Support the efforts of governmental conservation agencies and non-governmental organizations to conserve, acquire, and provide incentives to private landowners to conserve native prairie.
- Volunteer to participate in habitat management activities on lands where agencies, groups, or individuals are interested in managing for the Dakota skipper.
- Learn more about the Dakota skipper and native prairie. The *Status Assessment and Conservation Guidelines for Dakota Skipper* are available online at <http://midwest.fws.gov/endangered/insects/dask-status.pdf>. You may also contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for further information (see below).
- Share your concerns with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, state natural resource agency staff, and other conservation agencies so that we can address them in the process of planning for Dakota skipper recovery.

## 11. Where can I learn more about Dakota skippers and the efforts being made to conserve them?

For more information on Dakota skippers and ongoing conservation efforts, visit the Service's website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/endangered> or contact one of the following offices:

**In Minnesota:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Twin Cities Field Office, 4101 E. 80<sup>th</sup> St., Bloomington, MN 55425; Phone: (612) 725-3548 ext. 206; Fax:(612) 725-3609; Email: [Phil\\_Delphey@fws.gov](mailto:Phil_Delphey@fws.gov)

**In North Dakota:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Dakota Field Office, 3425 Miriam Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58501; Phone: (701) 250-4481; Fax: (701) 250-4400; Email: [Karen\\_Kreil@fws.gov](mailto:Karen_Kreil@fws.gov)

**In South Dakota:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, South Dakota Field Office, 420 South Garfield Ave., Suite 400, Pierre, SD 57501; Phone: (605) 224-8693; Fax: (605) 224-9974; Email: [Jodi\\_Whittier@fws.gov](mailto:Jodi_Whittier@fws.gov)