



News Release

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Critical Habitat for Four Rare Southwest Invertebrates to Be Reevaluated

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) reopened the comment period today for a 2002 critical habitat proposal for the Roswell springsnail, Koster's springsnail, Noel's amphipod and Pecos assiminea. The Service has agreed to reconsider listing of critical habitat for these species on the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The designated critical habitat outside of the Refuge at Diamond Y and Sandia springs will remain in place.

These four invertebrates are found in the springs, seeps and sinkholes in the Pecos River basin on federal lands managed by the Service, Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico, and on private lands managed by The Nature Conservancy in Texas. Invertebrates are animals without an internal skeleton.

The 2002 proposal included approximately 1,127 acres at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge and 397 acres at the East Sandia Spring and Diamond Y spring complexes managed by The Nature Conservancy of Texas. The 2005 final critical habitat designation excluded Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The Service is reevaluating that exclusion. A final decision is expected in 2010.

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.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Comments on the 2002 proposal and its supporting environmental assessment and economic analysis are being sought through May 11, 2009. Information may be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2009-0014; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N.

Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

Previously submitted comments need not be resubmitted. For further information, contact Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2105 Osuna NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87113; call (505) 761-4706; or visit <http://www.regulations.gov> (FWS-R2-ES-2009-0014).

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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