



News Release

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Service Seeks Public Comment on Proposal to List Four Central Texas Salamanders

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced that it will seek public comment on a proposal to protect four salamander species occurring within central Texas as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Service is also seeking comment on a proposal to designate critical habitat for these species in Bell, Travis, and Williamson Counties.

The four salamander species, the Austin blind salamander (*Eurycea waterlooensis*), Jollyville Plateau salamander (*Eurycea tonkawae*), Georgetown salamander (*Eurycea naufragia*) and the Salado salamander (*Eurycea chisholmensis*), are presently in danger of extinction throughout their range based on threats from habitat degradation, including reduced water quality and quantity and disturbance of spring sites. Water quality and quantity in the Edwards Aquifer is also being negatively impacted by increasing urbanization and population growth in areas that flow to where the salamanders are found.

“The Edwards Aquifer is an important water source not only for these four salamander species, but also for those living and working in the area,” said Adam Zerrenner, Austin Field Office Supervisor. “Efforts to improve and conserve the water and springs associated with the Edwards Aquifer will help ensure a healthy future for our community and the plants and animals that depend upon the Edwards Aquifer.”

The Austin blind, Jollyville Plateau, Georgetown and Salado salamanders are entirely aquatic and dependent upon water from the Edwards Aquifer for their survival, growth, and reproduction. The Austin blind salamander resides in the Barton Springs Segment of the Edwards Aquifer, while the other three species reside in habitat dependent on the Northern Segment of the Edwards Aquifer, including springs and spaces in the subsurface aquifer.

The ESA makes it illegal to kill, harm or otherwise “take” a listed species, or to possess, import, export or engage in interstate or international commerce of a listed species without authorization in the form of a permit from the Service. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or undertake do not jeopardize the existence of listed species, and directs the Service to work with federal agencies and other partners to develop and carry out recovery efforts for those species. Listing also focuses attention on the needs of the species, encouraging

conservation efforts by other agencies (federal, state and local), conservation groups, and other organizations and individuals.

The Service is proposing to designate a total of 5,983 acres of critical habitat in 52 units. The Service is proposing one unit (120 acres total) be designated as critical habitat for the Austin blind salamander in Travis County, Texas; 33 units (4,460 acres total) be designated as critical habitat for the Jollyville Plateau salamander in Travis and Williamson Counties, Texas; 14 units (1,031 acres total) be designated as critical habitat for the Georgetown salamander in Williamson County, Texas; and four units (372 acres total) be designated as critical habitat for the Salado salamander in Bell County, Texas.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA 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.

The Service is requesting comments or information from other concerned governmental agencies, Native American Tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning this proposed rule. Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before October 22, 2012.

The Service will hold two public meetings/public hearings to gather public comments on the listing proposal. Below is information related to each meeting/hearing:

September 5, 2012 – Williamson County

Informational meeting – 5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.

Public hearing – 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Wingate by Wyndham Round Rock

1209 N. IH 35 North, Exit 253 at Hwy 79

Round Rock, Texas 78664

September 6, 2012 – Travis County

Informational meeting - 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Public hearing - 8:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Thompson Conference Center

2405 Robert Dedman Drive, Room 2.102

Austin, Texas 78705

For additional information, contact Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin Ecological Services Office, 10711 Burnet Rd, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758, by telephone 512-490-0057 or by facsimile 512-490-0974. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and

the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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