

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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Fish and Wildlife Service to Conduct Status Review of the Sprague's pipit

The Sprague's pipit may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today, following an initial review of a petition seeking to protect the Sprague's pipit, a prairie songbird, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Service will undertake a more thorough review of the Sprague's pipit to determine whether to propose adding the species to the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife and plants.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the Sprague's pipit provided in the petition requesting listing the species under the ESA. The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to give the Sprague's pipit federal protection under the ESA. Rather, this finding is the first step in a long process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available.

To ensure this review is comprehensive, the Service is soliciting information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the Sprague's pipit and its habitat.

The Service is seeking information regarding the species historical and current status and distribution; its population size and trend; its biology and ecology; its taxonomy; ongoing conservation measures for the species and its habitat; and threats to the long-term persistence of the species.

If it is determined that listing the Sprague's pipit is warranted, the Service intends to propose critical habitat. Therefore, the Service also requests data and information on what may constitute physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species, where these features are currently found, and whether any of these features may require special management considerations or protection. In addition, the Service requests information regarding whether there are areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species that are essential to the conservation of the species.

Comments and information will be accepted until February 1, 2010 and can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Division of Policy and Directives Management; Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2009-0081; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The Service will evaluate all information regarding the status and distribution of the Sprague's pipit, including the impacts or potential impacts to the species resulting from either human activities or natural causes.

The Sprague's pipit is closely tied with native prairie habitat and breeds in the north-central United States in Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota as well as south-central Canada. Wintering occurs in the southern States of Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico.

In October 2008, WildEarth Guardians petitioned the Service to list the Sprague's pipit as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

The petitioners assert that several factors affect the Sprague's pipit and its habitat including the loss of native prairie throughout the Northern Great Plains as a result of agricultural conversion; oil and gas exploration; habitat fragmentation; cowbird parasitism; and climate change.

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The Sprague's pipit is a relatively small (4–6 inches long and weighs 0.8-0.9 ounces) passerine endemic to the North American grasslands. It has a plain buff colored face with a large eye-ring. The Sprague's pipit is a ground nester that breeds and winters on open grasslands. It feeds mostly on insects and spiders and some seeds.

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.