

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## Fish and Wildlife Service

## 50 CFR Part 17

## Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; 90-Day Finding and Commencement of Status Review for a Petition To List the California Tiger Salamander

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of petition finding.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces a 90-day finding on a petition to list the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). The petition has been found to present substantial information indicating the requested action may be warranted. Through issuance of this notice, the Service is commencing a formal review of the status of this species.

**DATES:** The finding announced in this notice was made on October 27, 1992. Comments and materials related to this petition finding may be submitted to the Field Supervisor at the address below until further notice.

**ADDRESSES:** Data, information, comments or questions concerning the status of the petitioned species described below should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, room E-1803, Sacramento, California 95825-1846. The petition, finding, supporting data, and comments are available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Michael Long at the above address (916/78-4613).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:****Background**

Section 4(b)(3)(A) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1533) (Act), requires that the Service make a finding on whether a petition to list, delist, or reclassify a species presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted. To the maximum extent practicable, this finding is to be made within 90 days of the receipt of the petition, and the finding is to be published promptly in the *Federal Register*. If the Service finds that a petition presents substantial information indicating that the requested action may be warranted, then the Service initiates a status review

on that species. Section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Act requires the Service to make a finding as to whether or not the petitioned action is warranted within 1-year of the receipt of a petition that presents substantial information.

On February 26, 1992, the Service received a petition from Dr. H. Bradley Shaffer of the University of California, Davis, to list the California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) as an endangered species. Dr. Shaffer clearly identified his letter, dated February 20, 1992, as a petition. The petition, supporting documentation, and other documents have been reviewed to determine if substantial information has been presented indicating that the requested action may be warranted. This notice announces the 90-day finding for the petition to list the California tiger salamander under the Endangered Species Act.

The California tiger salamander is a large (7.5 to 16.2 centimeters (3.0 to 6.4 inches)), stocky, terrestrial salamander with a broad, rounded snout. The small eyes have black irises and protrude from the head. Coloration consists of white or pale yellow spots or bars on a black background, but is variable depending on location. Undersurfaces vary from almost uniform white or pale yellow to a variegated pattern of white or pale yellow, and black.

Early researchers reported the California tiger salamander as a full species (*Ambystoma californiense*). Subsequent researchers considered it to be one of many subspecies within the *Ambystoma tigrinum* complex. Recent genetic work has shown the California tiger salamander to be consistently differentiated from other members of the *Ambystoma tigrinum* complex, and indicates the species is isolated from others in the complex. In addition, the California tiger salamander differs significantly from other tiger salamanders in its pattern of egg-laying and breeding phenology. Although discussion on the taxonomy of this salamander continues, it is now considered to be a full species by many of those familiar with this animal (Shaffer, University of California, Davis, pers. comm.; Jennings, Department of Herpetology, California Academy of Sciences, pers. comm.). Based on the currently available information, the Service accepts the full species status for the California tiger salamander. The species is designated as a category 2 candidate in the November 21, 1991, Animal Notice of Review (56 FR 56804), and is classified as a "Species of Special Concern" by the California Department of Fish and Game.

The historical distribution of the California tiger salamander apparently included large portions of the Central Valley of California from the southern San Joaquin Valley into the southern Sacramento Valley north of the Sacramento River Delta. The salamander also was found in the lower foothills along the eastern side of the Central Valley and in the foothills of the Coast Ranges. The California tiger salamander occurs in grasslands and open oak woodlands. Necessary habitat components include ground squirrel or gopher burrows for underground retreats and breeding ponds, such as seasonal wetlands, vernal pools, or slow-moving streams, that do not support fish. Since the salamander may migrate up to a mile from its underground retreats to breeding ponds, unobstructed migration corridors also are required.

The petition asserts that the California tiger salamander should be listed as an endangered species because of documented dramatic habitat losses and population declines throughout the historical range of the species. The decline of the tiger salamander is attributed to conversion of grassland and oak woodland habitat to agriculture, urban development, fish introductions, and other anthropogenic factors. These factors have extirpated this species from large geographic areas of its former range, notably, the Central Valley of California.

Vernal pools, the species' primary breeding habitat, have been reduced by about 90 percent in the Central Valley (Holland 1988). The California tiger salamander has been eliminated from approximately 55 percent of the estimated 300-350 historic breeding localities used by this species (Jennings, pers. comm.). The Service is aware of numerous development projects that threaten this species. Urban expansion threatens the remaining California tiger salamander habitat, particularly in the foothills along the eastern side of the Central Valley, and the Carmel Valley, Livermore, and Santa Rosa areas. Projects that do not eliminate tiger salamander habitat directly may further fragment extant populations and prevent recolonization after extinctions of local populations.

The petition has been reviewed by staff at the Sacramento Field Office in Sacramento, California, and the Regional Office in Portland, Oregon. The Service finds that the petitioner has presented substantial information indicating that the requested action may be warranted. This finding is based on the scientific and commercial information contained in the petition.

referenced in the petition, and otherwise available to the Service at this time.

This finding initiates a status review for this species. The Service would appreciate any additional data, comments, and suggestions from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning the status of this species.

#### *References Cited*

Holland, R.F. 1988. What about this vernal pool business? Pages 351-355 *IN* J.A. Kusler, S. Daly, and G. Brooks, Editors. Urban wetlands. Proceedings of the National Wetland Symposium. Oakland, California.

#### **Author**

The primary author of this notice is Michael M. Long (see **ADDRESSES** section).

#### **List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 17**

Endangered and threatened species, Exports, Imports, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, and Transportation.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1361-1407; 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544; 16 U.S.C. 4201-4245; Pub. L. 99-625, 100 Stat. 3500; unless otherwise noted.

**Dated:** October 27, 1992.

**Richard N. Smith,**

*Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

[FR Doc. 92-28038 Filed 11-18-92; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-56-M