



NOAA
FISHERIES



The Latest Findings

- NOAA is proposing to list 66 species under the ESA—54 as threatened and 12 as endangered.
- The agency found that 16 of the 82 species in the original petition do not warrant listing under the ESA.
- The threats to these proposed coral species are global and local.
- In addition to the 66 species being proposed for listing for the first time, two Caribbean species are proposed for reclassification from threatened to endangered—elkhorn (*Acropora palmata*) and staghorn (*A. cervicornis*) corals.

NOAA's Evaluation of 82 Coral Species Under the Federal Endangered Species Act

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) evaluated the level of protection necessary for 82 species of reef-building corals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The following FAQs provide background on the issue, including the agency's science-based evaluation process, and outline opportunities for public comment on NOAA's latest findings.

Why did NOAA start the evaluation of these coral species?

On February 10, 2010, NOAA found that the Center for Biological Diversity presented substantial information indicating that listing under the ESA *may be* warranted for 82 of the 83 petitioned species.

Once NOAA made that initial finding, what happened next?

NOAA convened a Biological Review Team to initiate a formal status review of the 82 species. The result was a [Status Review Report](#), released in April 2012. The report incorporated and summarized the best available scientific and commercial data to date, and it addressed the status of each of the 82 species. NOAA also published a *Draft Management Report*, which catalogued the current regulatory, conservation, and research efforts that may yield protection for these coral species.

What methods did NOAA use to collect the best available data and information?

Between February 2010 and April 2012, NOAA's Biological Review Team assembled the best available scientific and commercial information on the status of the 82 candidate species, resulting in a peer-reviewed Status Review Report. The agency also conducted a public engagement process between April and July 2012 to gather additional scientific information, allow time for a public review of the Status Review and Draft Management Reports, and to further engage the public. All relevant information gathered was summarized in a [Supplemental Information Report](#). Together, the Status Review, Supplemental Information, and Final Management reports form the basis of our [findings](#).

What did NOAA do once all of the scientific information was collected and the newest evaluation was complete?

On November 30, 2012, NOAA announced its findings on whether listing *is warranted* for each of the 82 species. Based on its review, NOAA is proposing to list 66 coral species and reclassify two under the ESA. Of the 66 species, 54 are proposed as [threatened](#) and 12 as [endangered](#). Also, NOAA has decided that 16 of the 82 species included in the original petition do not warrant listing under the ESA. In addition to the 66 species being proposed for listing for the first time, 2 Caribbean species—elkhorn and staghorn—are being proposed for reclassification from threatened to endangered.

Declining Coral Populations

Coral reefs world-wide have declined significantly due to a variety of factors ranging from ocean warming to land-based pollution. Some individual species in the Caribbean have declined by up to 98%.

Threats to Corals

The three most severe threats:

- Rising ocean temperatures
- Ocean acidification
- Coral disease

Overall, NOAA identified 19 threats, including ecological effects of fishing and poor land-use practices. It's likely that threats to coral will increase over time.

Impact of Coral Loss

When corals are degraded or destroyed, losses include: reduced shoreline protection; loss of habitat for a variety of species, including commercially important fish; and lost jobs and business through tourism and recreation.

Contacts for More Information

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What happens now that these species are proposed for listing?

NOAA is currently *proposing* to list or reclassify these species. Before making a final decision on this proposal we are asking for comments from the public, other governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, and any other interested parties. Public hearings will be scheduled in January and February 2013 in several locations in the Pacific Islands and in the Southeast regions.

Our community has questions, who will answer those?

NOAA will continue to work with communities to help them understand how a potential listing may or may not impact them. For example, listing species does not generally result in the prohibition of activities like fishing or diving. Rather, it only prohibits harm or injury of listed species if it occurs and isn't covered by a permit. We will also work with our partners to continue to ensure that coral research (e.g., research that might help recover the species) continues. If you have questions, please contact one of the individuals identified below.

What will happen if any of these species are listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA?

If any of these species are ultimately listed, the ESA provides many tools to assist in the protection and recovery of threatened or endangered species. If a species is listed, NOAA will designate [critical habitat](#) if determinable and prudent. We may also identify specific regulations for the conservation of *threatened* species, because ESA prohibitions against “[take](#)” are not automatically applied as they are for species listed as *endangered*. We may develop [recovery plan](#)(s) to identify the criteria that must be met so that the species no longer need the protection of the ESA. We would also [consult](#) with federal agencies on actions that they carry out, fund, or authorize that “may affect” listed corals to ensure the action does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species. Further, we may issue [permits](#) for actions that might result in the “take” of a listed species.

Q. How can I participate in this process?

A. You can submit a public comment online via www.regulations.gov and enter NOAA-NMFS-2010-0036 into the keyword search. Also, there will be 18 public hearings held in January and February 2013. A schedule for those will be posted online at: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2012/11/82corals.html. NOAA will also hold several webinars to engage the public. Information on those will be listed on the websites listed below.

For supporting documents and more information, please visit:

NOAA Fisheries National

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2012/11/82corals.html>

NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Region

http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/PRD_coral.html

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/esa/82CoralSpecies.htm>