

Proposed Listing of the Suwannee moccasinshell as threatened

About the Document

Title: Proposed Listing of the Suwannee moccasinshell as threatened

Purpose: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared a proposal to list the Suwannee moccasinshell (*Medionidus walkeri*) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The proposed listing rule published in the **Federal Register** on October 6, 2015, for review and comments.

Comment Submittal:

(1) *Electronically:* Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–R4–ES–2015–0142, which is the docket number for the proposed listing. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) *By hard copy:* Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R4–ES–2015–0142; Division of Policy, Performance, and Management Programs (PPM); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC; 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803.

About the Peer Review Process

Type of Review: Influential

Date of Peer Review: Peer review for the proposed listing rule will occur between October 6, 2015 and December 7, 2015.

Dissemination Date of the Final Rulemaking Document: October 2015

Process: The Service is soliciting written comments from three independent scientific reviewers. Formal request for peer review was made by individual letters to experts from various backgrounds at universities, institutions, and state agencies. Reviewers have been selected by the Service for their recognized expertise with the Suwannee moccasinshell or its habitat, or for their general expertise with mussel ecology, threats, and conservation. We are following our national policy on peer review and our regional approach for peer review for rulemakings. In selecting peer reviewers, we considered four key factors – expertise, balance, independence, and avoidance of conflict of interest.

This review is occurring concurrently with the public comment period for the proposed action. The public comment period is now open and will close on December 7, 2015.

The Service will use the information received from the peer review process, as appropriate, to develop the final listing rule for Suwannee moccasinshell.

The Service is providing each peer reviewer with information necessary to complete the peer review. We have requested that reviewers use the Southeast Region's guidance to ensure that reviews comply with the 1994 policy statement for listing and critical habitat designation under the Act. Peer reviewers are expected to: review all material provided; identify, review, and provide other relevant data; and provide written comments on relevance and soundness of data, analysis or assumptions of data, and whether we have used the best available science in making the proposed determinations. Peer review comments will be public documents.

Peer Reviewers*

The Service will request peer review from the following individuals:

Michael M. Gangloff, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.

Stephen Golladay, Ph.D., Associate Scientist, Jones Ecological Research Center, Newton, GA.

Matthew Rowe, Freshwater Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Gainesville, FL.

**Disclosure:* In selecting peer reviewers, we considered four key factors – expertise, balance, independence, and conflict of interest. We believe all the peer reviewers possess the necessary scientific and technical expertise (knowledge, experience, and skills) to perform the review, and they represent a diversity of scientific disciplines and perspectives (providing balance). With respect to independence, none of the peer reviewers are employed by the Service, and none were involved in producing the draft documents. One of the peer reviewers (Gangloff) has received research funding from the Service to conduct biological studies on freshwater mussels in the southeast region; however, we believe any minor concerns about independence are outweighed by the reviewer's unique expertise and our inclusion of additional reviewers to provide balance. Perceived conflicts of interest are possible for some reviewers (e.g., associations with regulated entities or contractual relationships with agencies such as the Service); however, any perceived conflicts will be mitigated by the balanced list of peer reviewers, all of whom are uniquely qualified to conduct the review.

About Public Participation

Public comments on the proposed listing are being sought through the publication of the proposed rule in the **Federal Register**, a press release of the availability of the proposal to interested parties, and a public hearing if requested. The Service will consider all comments received prior to publishing a final determination.

The Service published a notice in the **Federal Register** for the proposed listing of Suwannee moccasinshell as threatened. A summary of the results of the peer review will also be published with the final rule determination in the **Federal Register**.

This peer review plan is made available on this website to allow the public to monitor our

compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

Contact: Sandra Pursifull, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Panama City Ecological Services Office, 850-769-0552 x240 or sandra_pursifull@fws.gov.