

Peer Review of Scientific Information

12 month Finding and Proposed Listing and Designation of Critical Habitat for the Spring Pygmy Sunfish

About the Document:

Title: 12-month Petition Finding and Proposed Listing and Designation of Critical Habitat for Spring Pygmy Sunfish

Summary: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to list as threatened and designate critical habitat for the spring pygmy sunfish (*Elassoma alabamae*) pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). We are proposing two separate habitat units that encompass approximately 8 stream miles and 1,617 acres of spring-pool and spring-influenced wetland in Limestone County, Alabama, for designation as critical habitat.

Type of Review: Influential

Timeline of the Peer Review:

Draft document disseminated: October 5, 2012

Peer review initiated: (October 5, 2012)

Peer review completed by: (December 3, 2012)

Date Document will be finalized: (October 2013)

Peer Review Process:

The Service solicited written comments from three independent scientific reviewers. Formal request for peer review were made to experts with the Geological Survey of Alabama and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Conservation Fisheries. These reviewers were selected by the Service for their recognized expertise with the biology and distribution of these species. This review will occur during the public comment period for the proposed action. The first comment period will close on December 3, 2012. We have provided each peer reviewer with information necessary to complete the review, and request 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 determination. Peer review comments will be public documents, and visible on the www.regulations.gov website.

A second comment period will open following the release of the Draft Economic Analysis. The Service will use the information received from the peer review, as appropriate, to develop the final listing and critical habitat rule for the spring pygmy sunfish.

Public Participation:

Public comments on the proposed listing and critical habitat rule were sought with a Federal Register announcement on October 2, 2012, and the distribution by mail and press release of this announcement to interested parties. This comment period ends on December 3, 2012. A second comment period will open with the announcement in the Federal Register of the availability of the economic analysis. This comment period is expected in early 2013 and will include an additional opportunity to comment on the proposed rule. 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."

For additional information or questions, please contact Daniel Drennen of the Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office at 601/321-1127 or via email at daniel_drennen@fws.gov.