

Amargosa toad considered for listing

SPECIAL TO THE PVT

LAS VEGAS -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Thursday, announced it will conduct an in-depth status review of the Amargosa toad (*Bufo nelsoni*) to determine if it warrants federal protection as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

A notice was published Thursday, in the Federal Register, which opens a 60-day public comment period.

The decision, commonly known as a 90-day finding, is based on scientific information about the species provided in a petition requesting listing of the species under the act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received the petition, dated Feb. 26, 2008, from the Center for Biological Diversity and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility requesting that the Amargosa toad be listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA.

"The finding does not mean that the service has decided it is appropriate to list the Amargosa toad," said Bob Williams, state supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Nevada office. "The 90-day finding is the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available. We are encouraging the public to submit any relevant information

about the toad and its habitat to us for consideration in the comprehensive review."

The Center for Biological Diversity claims the toad's existence is threatened by wild burros grazing in the marshes, off-road vehicles and tapping groundwater for future solar developments upstream of the marshes.

The Nature Conservancy helped form the Amargosa Toad Working Group which brought together federal and state wildlife agencies, private groups and land owners in Beatty, but the Center for Biological Diversity has questioned the effectiveness of the group.

The Amargosa toad is a member of the family Bufonidae which includes North American true toads. The species is endemic to the Oasis Valley just north of Beatty.

The historical and current range of the Amargosa toad is estimated to be a 10-mile stretch of the Amargosa River and nearby spring systems roughly between the towns of Springdale and Beatty. The amount of known and potential Amargosa toad habitat is estimated at 8,440 acres on both public and private lands.

To ensure this status review is comprehensive, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting information from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, Native American Tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning the status of the Amargosa toad. Based on the in-depth status review, the service will issue a 12-month finding on the petition making one of three possible determinations:

- * Listing is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken.

- * Listing as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will publish a proposal to list, solicit independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seek input from the public and consider the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In general, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed and the final decision.

- * Listing is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the Federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the USFWS works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk.

A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

The Endangered Species Act makes it illegal to kill, harm or otherwise “take” a listed species, or to possess, import, export or engage in interstate or international commerce of a listed species without authorization in the form of a permit from the Service.

The Endangered Species Act also requires all federal agencies to min-

imize the impact of their activities on listed species, and directs the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work with federal agencies and other partners to develop and carry out recovery efforts for those species.

Listing also focuses attention on the needs of the species, encouraging conservation efforts by other agencies (federal, state and local), conservation groups and other organizations and individuals.

Anyone who wishes to submit information regarding the Amargosa toad has the following options:

* Federal eRulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

* Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R8-ES-2009-0047, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received by Nov. 9.