



ENDANGERED SPECIES:

FWS adds 23 Oahu plants and flies to list; more decisions coming soon

Laura Petersen, E&E reporter

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Twenty-three Hawaiian plants and damselflies were added to the federal endangered species list today, but 14 mollusks in the Pacific Northwest did not make the cut.

A flurry of decisions like these is expected from the Fish and Wildlife Service over the next two weeks, including on the lesser prairie chicken and Mexican wolf.

The agency is required to make various listing or habitat decisions on 258 species by the end of this fiscal year, which is Sept. 30, according to the terms of a settlement agreement with environmental groups.

WildEarth Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity agreed in 2011 to limit lawsuits against FWS for missing ESA deadlines, and in exchange FWS laid out a six-year work plan to address its backlog on hundreds of species.

FWS met its obligations last year and appears on track to meet its deadlines this fiscal year, as well, said Mark Salvo, the wildlife program director for WildEarth Guardians.

While the official deadline is Sept. 30, additional time may be required for the decisions to appear in the Federal Register, Salvo said.

“While we may not agree with every decision the service might make under our agreement, the important thing is that the service is making the required decisions and on schedule,” Salvo said.

In today’s final decisions, federal regulators found 20 Oahu plant species warrant federal protection because they are primarily threatened by habitat destruction from feral pigs and goats and invasive species.

Some species are extremely rare, such as the shrub hai-wale -- six to eight plants were observed in one valley between 2001 and 2008 after being presumed extinct since the 1800s.

As part of the final rule, the agency designated or revised critical habitat for these and 101 other island species, covering 42,804 acres. Instead of focusing only on areas where the plants occur, FWS identified areas of ecosystems that support multiple species as the most suitable for habitat conservation.

In a separate rule on the Pacific Northwest mollusks, the agency determined eight aquatic mollusks have not been formally described in scientific literature as distinct species, so cannot be considered for listing. Scientific evidence did not show the other six are in danger of extinction, the agency concluded.

Last week, FWS proposed adding two Texas plants to the list, the Texas golden gladeceess and Neches River rose-mallow, as well as the Jemez Mountains salamander in New Mexico.