

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/fl-rattlesnake-endangered-species-20120509,0,5431528.story>

U.S. moves to protect eastern diamondback rattlesnakes

By David Fleshler, Sun Sentinel

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We may be running short of oil, fresh water and good jobs, but the federal government is apparently concerned that we're running out of rattlesnakes.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Wednesday announced a preliminary decision that it "may be warranted" to protect the eastern diamondback rattlesnake under the Endangered Species Act. The decision came in response to a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity and three other environmental groups.

The snake, the largest of the rattlesnake species, has vanished from much of the southeastern United States, due to the loss of longleaf pinelands and the tradition of "rattlesnake roundups" in Alabama and Georgia, in which one of the capture methods involves pouring gasoline down their burrows. The snake's biggest stronghold is Florida, where they live throughout the peninsula in dry, sandy habitats.

"Survival of these snakes in large part depends on whether people continue to persecute them or instead choose to allow these amazing creatures to share the land with us," said Bill Matturro, of Protect All Living Species, one of the groups that filed the petition.

Although not aggressive, the eastern diamondback can strike a distance of two thirds its body length, which means an eight-foot snake can get you from five feet away. Fortunately, they prefer rabbits.