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First Fish That's No Longer Endangered: Freshwater Species of the Week

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This week, for the first time, a fish has been declared recovered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed this week that the Oregon chub (*Oregonichthys crameri*) “has recovered and no longer meets the definition of an endangered species or a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.”

The silvery speckled minnow is found only in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The chub was listed as endangered in 1993, when there were thought to be fewer than 1,000 remaining, thanks to development of its wetland habitat and predation by introduced sports fish.

But thanks to federal protection of habitat there are more than 160,000 of the three-inch-long fish today,



says Tierra Curry, a Portland-based senior scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit that works on endangered species conservation.

Curry says she is “thrilled” about the proposed delisting of the chub. “It’s an example of how the different steps of the Endangered Species Act are successful in recovering species,” she says. “It got listed, then it got a scientific recovery plan, then protected habitat, then it recovered.”

Curry adds that the Oregon chub lives in backwater areas that also serve as important habitat for other species, meaning the recovery of the fish bodes well for the ecosystem.

The Oregon chub now lives in 80 distinct populations, up from a mere eight in 1993. The fish lives in tributaries of

the Willamette, the Middle Fork Willamette and the Santiam Rivers. It eats insect larvae, including those of pesky mosquitoes, and was first discovered in the early 1900s outside Portland.

The proposed removal will still have to wind its way through the federal government. In proposing the move, the Fish and Wildlife Service praised what it calls partnership between federal, state, tribal, and nonprofit entities to save the chub.

“Wildlife are only put on the endangered species list when they’re in serious trouble, so it takes time to address the problems they face and bring them back to health,” Curry said in a statement. “For the chub that process took 21 years. For the Florida panther, it’s expected to take until 2085. Saving imperiled wildlife takes time, but Endangered Species Act protection with critical habitat designation remains the most powerful tool we have to save species from extinction.”