

Threats still face arroyo toad, but conservation efforts helping

By Cheri Carlson / Ventura County Star
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Conservation efforts over the past 20 years have boosted the survival chances for a small toad listed as an endangered species, federal officials said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says the arroyo toad may be ready to be downlisted from endangered to threatened status.

“This demonstrates once again how the Endangered Species Act can work to pull plants and animals back from the brink of extinction,” agency Director Dan Ashe said in a statement about the proposal.

In Ventura County, the toads have been found in the Santa Clara River and Sespe Creek areas, and also near Piru. It’s one of three species in the county recently taken off the endangered species list or proposed for downlisting.

The tiny tidewater goby was proposed to be reclassified from endangered to threatened earlier this year. And the island night lizard, found on three of the Channel Islands, came off the endangered species list last week.

The environmental group Center for Biological Diversity has cited the island night lizard as one of Endangered Species Act’s success stories.



Arroyo toad contributed photo/u.s. fish and wildlife service

The lizard bounced back as agencies, including the National Park Service and Navy, worked to remove nonnative rabbits, pigs, goats, sheep and deer that had decimated its habitat.

“We support delisting when the science clearly shows the species has recovered,” said Brett Hartl, endangered species policy director for the Center for Biological Diversity in Washington, D.C.

But reclassifying the arroyo toad from endangered to threatened may be premature, the group said. The toad has made some progress toward recovery, but there’s still more work to do, said senior attorney Collette Adkins Giese.



Arroyo toad contributed photo/u.s. fish and wildlife service

Hover over image for more Toad facts
“We think additional monitoring is needed,” she said.

In 2011, the Fish and Wildlife Service received a petition from the Pacific Legal Foundation to reclassify the arroyo toad from endangered to threatened. The request was based on the service’s own five-year status review, which also recommended downlisting.

Threats to the toad’s survival range from loss of habitat from construction of dams, roads and other development to recreational uses. While threats remain, the service says the severity has decreased and conservation efforts have helped lessen the impacts.

Officials said the toad’s historic range had declined by at least two-thirds by 1994, when it was listed under the Endangered Species Act. At that time, the arroyo toad was found in 22 river basins between Monterey County and Baja California.

More recent studies show the toad populations still are in those 22 spots, and several more. The toads now are found in 25 river basins in the United States and an additional 10 in Mexico, but it’s probably just a result of additional studies and surveys, the service reported.

That the toads still are in the same 22 locations demonstrates the populations are self-sustaining, said Della Snyder-Velto, senior biologist with the service. Even if the toads are reclassified as threatened, they will remain protected by federal law, she said.

But the Center for Biological Diversity thinks there’s not yet enough information to determine if the toads are ready to be downlisted, including whether they are breeding and the populations are growing or shrinking, Giese said.

For more information about the proposal, go to <http://regulations.gov> and search for arroyo toad.

To get involved

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments about the proposal to downlist the arroyo toad from endangered to threatened status through May 27.

Comments can be submitted online at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for arroyo toad.

Submit comments by mail or hand-delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R8-ES-2014-0007, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

To request a hearing, submit a written request by May 12 to Acting Field Supervisor, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, CA 93003.

For more information about the proposal, go to <http://www.fws.gov/ventura>.

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Read more: <http://www.vcstar.com/news/2014/apr/10/threats-still-face-arroyo-toad-but-conservation/#ixzz2yaYPlOql>
- [vcstar.com](http://www.vcstar.com)