



## Southwest Snakes Given Endangered Species Protection

By Rachel Lund  
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The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has granted protection under the Endangered Species Act to two rare snakes found in Arizona and New Mexico.

Collette Adkins Giese, a lawyer for The Center for Biological Diversity said this decision can affect more than just the snakes.

“Protecting these snakes and the shrinking waters of the Southwest will benefit not just these snakes, but every other animal that depends on these river systems, as well as humans,” said Giese. “We depend on these waters for recreation, sometimes for our water supply.”

Giese said populations of the narrow-headed garter snake and the northern Mexican garter snake have been declining for years. Livestock grazing,



(Photo by Pierson Hil) Narrow-headed garter snake

water withdrawal and agricultural and urban sprawl have all attributed to the loss of their habitat.

Now that these snakes are classified as protected species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service will set aside critical habitat for these snakes.

“The Endangered Species Act is really a powerful tool to protect our nations rarest animals,” said Giese. “So here, now that these snakes are protected under the act, the agency will begin taking steps to protect its habitat.”

She added that just having these snakes on the list will raise awareness for the snakes and their habitat.

“The decline of these snakes is typical of a catastrophic loss of aquatic animals across the Southwest,” said Giese. “We as humans are doing a bad job of preserving these important and precious

waterways of the Southwest and it's not just these garter snakes that are having trouble. There are so many other animals in these areas that are declining and we really have a responsibility to turn things around."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will work with the Bureau of Land Management to assess any threats to their habitat and work to rectify those problems.