

Snake Species In Arizona, New Mexico Now Listed As Threatened



PHOTO: The narrow-headed garter snake and the northern Mexican garter snake, which live in Arizona and New Mexico, are now officially listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service

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TUCSON, Ariz. - Two snake species that call areas of Arizona and New Mexico home are now officially listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Colette Adkins Giese, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, says the narrow-headed garter snake and northern Mexican garter snake now have a better chance of survival. She says the action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will help protect the snakes' declining habitat along rivers and streams.

"As soon as their listing becomes effective, it's illegal for anybody to take these animals out of the wild," says Adkins Giese. "It's illegal to kill them. It will also result in habitat protection."

While the Fish and Wildlife Service listed the snakes as threatened as part of an agreement resulting from a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Adkins Giese says another component in the process is the development of a recovery plan to restore the snake's population.

She notes the greatest impact to the reptile's habitat is livestock grazing, water withdrawal, urban sprawl and the introduction of non-native species such as sunfish, bass and crayfish, which have since spread throughout the region. Adkins Giese notes protecting the animal's habitat will also help humans.

"Protecting these snakes and their habitat in the shrinking waters of the Southwest will benefit every animal that depends on these river systems, including humans" she says. "We depend on these river systems for our own water supply, as well recreation."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimate populations of the narrow-headed garter and northern Mexican garter snakes have declined by as much as three-quarters. Adkins Giese says that means the snakes are bordering on extinction.