



ENDANGERED SPECIES: FWS proposes threatened listing for fisher population, black pinesnake

Joshua Learn / E&E reporter
Monday, October 6, 2014

The Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed threatened listings under the Endangered Species Act for a population of a member of the weasel family and the black pinesnake.

FWS will seek peer review and comment for a 60-day period starting from tomorrow, when the proposals will be published in the Federal Register for the black pinesnake and the West Coast population of the fisher.

The service estimates that 11 populations of black pinesnake live in different parts of Alabama and Mississippi and that it has been extirpated from parts of its historical range, including three counties in Mississippi and all of Louisiana. The FWS found that the snake was threatened by the loss and degradation of their longleaf pine habitats as well as roads, fire suppression strategies and their intentional killing by humans, among other things.

"We find that endangered status is not appropriate for the black pinesnake because, while we found the threats to the subspecies to be significant and rangewide, we do not know them to be either sudden or calamitous," the FWS proposal for the snake said.

FWS also said it would likely include critical habitat designations for the snake: "Because we have determined that the designation of critical habitat will not likely increase the degree of threat to the species and may provide some measure of benefit, we determine that designation of critical habitat is prudent for the black pinesnake."

The Center for Biological Diversity petitioned for the listing of the snake in 2004, but the reptile has been on the candidate list for an ESA listing since 1982.

Collette Adkins Giese, CBD's reptile and amphibian senior attorney, said that it was good news that the snake would finally get some protection. "The Endangered Species Act has prevented the extinction of 99 percent of the plants and animals under its care," she said. "Protection for this beautiful snake will help safeguard its future, along with the future of the South's once extensive longleaf pine forests."

Adkins Giese also said that the snake's plight is also indicative of a larger problem affecting the longleaf pine forests in the region that many species depend on.

"The proposed listing of yet another longleaf-dependent species should be a wake-

up call that the Southeast is losing its natural heritage through the destruction of this critically endangered ecosystem," she said.

The West Coast population of the fisher lives in Washington state, Oregon and California, and FWS found in its proposal, also to be published in the Federal Register tomorrow, that it faces threats from rodent-killing pesticides and habitat loss from wildfires and vegetation management.

A listing for the fisher was first proposed in 1990 by the Sierra Biodiversity Project. FWS issued a positive 90-day finding on the population's need for listing status in 2003 after another petition was submitted by CBD and other groups.

Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the center, said she was elated about the protection proposal.

"Now more than ever the fisher needs protection from old-growth forest logging, trapping and poisoning," she said. "In particular, the strong protections provided by the Northwest Forest Plan need to be maintained, including on [Oregon and California Railroad Revested Lands], and dangerous rodenticides that are being used by illegal marijuana cultivators and that have poisoned fishers need to be completely banned."

FWS said that it found designation of critical habitat for the fisher to be "not determinable" in the report. FWS supports hunting restrictions for goat-antelope species

The service also published a determination to list the straight-horned markhor -- a goat-antelope native to Afghanistan and Pakistan -- as threatened under ESA. The decision com-

bined the straight-horned markhor with the Kabul markhor into a single subspecies, and the new ruling will have some effect on the importation of sport-hunted trophies from the species.

"This regulation supports and encourages conservation actions for the straight-horned markhor," the ruling said.