



ENDANGERED SPECIES: Greens decry FWS decision against listing Ariz. snake

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The Obama administration has decided against an Endangered Species Act listing for a small snake facing development pressure in Arizona's Sonoran Desert.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's decision on the Tucson shovel-nosed snake is set for publication in tomorrow's Federal Register.

"We initially found that listing was warranted," said Steve Spangle, a field supervisor for the service's Arizona Ecological Services office, in a phone interview. But subsequent genetic findings, he said, showed the snake had a much larger habitat than initially believed -- almost triple previous range estimates.

Most of the newly discovered range is outside the Tucson-Phoenix corridor of development in the Sonoran Desert.

"We believe it's secure," Spangle said.

The Center for Biological Diversity and Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection had filed a petition to list the snake in 2004. The shovel-nose has been on FWS's candidate list for protection since 2010.

"I'm saddened that under the service's decision the snake will likely go extinct around Tucson and Phoenix," said Collette Adkins Giese, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

In an email, Giese wrote that it is "important that listing decisions be based on a careful review of the science" and that CBD would need time to review the new information and evaluate FWS's decision.

CBD describes the snake in a Web post as "a highly adapted animal that swims through sandy desert soils and preys on everything from beetle larvae to scorpions. Its specialized nature and narrow habitat requirements make it vulnerable to habitat destruction from agriculture and urban sprawl."

Noah Greenwald, the director of CBD's Endangered Species Program, said FWS's decision on the snake is part of a larger issue involving the definition of how species are determined as in need of a protected listing under the Obama administration.

"What they've done is that they've defined a portion of range as significant if its loss would endanger the species as a whole," Greenwald said. "Because of this new policy, [the snake is] not getting protection. They're

basically saying, fine -- let it go extinct around Tucson and Phoenix."

The decisions come as part of a bulk of decisions FWS agreed to make to resolve lawsuits by CBD and WildEarth Guardians. FWS must submit proposed rulings or not-warranted findings on 757 backlogged species by 2018.