



# Courthouse News Service

## Feds Eye Protection for North Carolina River Species

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CN) – Two North Carolina aquatic creatures could receive federal protection under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said Tuesday.

One is a small catfish that has “furious” in its scientific name, and the other is medium-sized aquatic salamander called a waterdog. Both are smaller than a foot and call North Carolina’s flowing streams and rivers home.

Both creatures face threats from pollution, habitat loss and logging, leading the federal government to say nearly 1,000 miles of river should be designated critical habitat for the Neuse River waterdog and the Carolina madtom or *Noturus furiosus*, a catfish with stinging spines.

The madtom thrives in silt-free waters and nestle into cobble bottoms as part of a diverse habitat.



The Carolina madtom, a type of catfish. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

The waterdog, with its flame-like gills, prefers hard clay or soil foundation to make its home and leaf beds for their nests.

Fish and Wildlife proposes listing the Carolina madtom as endangered and the Neuse River waterdog as threatened. Additionally, the agency proposes setting aside about 740 miles as critical habitat for the Neuse River waterdog and about 260 miles for the Carolina madtom catfish.

The Neuse River waterdog can be found in streams in the Piedmont plateau to coastal streams up to the point of saltwater intrusion, according to the service. The Piedmont plateau, located between the Atlantic coastal plain and the main Appalachian Mountains, has seen a sharp decline in the number of waterdogs. The Tar-Pamlico, Trent and Neuse rivers have also become less inhabitable for the salamander due to a decline in water quality and quantity, instream habitat, and habitat connectivity.

Developments upstream have contributed contaminants to once fresh waters including nitrogen, phosphorus, chloride, insecticides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and personal care products.

<https://i1.wp.com/www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/NeuseRiverWaterdog.jpg?w=1140>The Neuse River waterdog, a salamander species. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

There are also the other major impacts to stream dwelling like road construction and logging which can cut into how far a waterdog or madtom are able travel.

In its filing, Fish and Wildlife lays out two scenarios that could play out over the next 50 years. The optimistic model involves effects from drought, continued urban development and all the negative impacts to the environment that entails.

The second scenario is much more pessimistic, foreseeing extreme heat, more storms and flooding – as well as severe drought conditions. Based on this model, urbanization of the wetlands triples.

“Increased urbanization and climate change effects are likely to result in increased impacts to water quality, water flow, and habitat connectivity, and we predict that there is limited capacity for species restoration under this scenario,” Fish and Wildlife says in its findings.

The agency hopes to attain a third scenario, which includes minimal impacts from climate change, fewer impacts from developments and protected habitats benefitting the species.

The Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the federal government for protection of the creatures and hundreds more in 2010.

Perrin de Jong, a North Carolina-based staff attorney with the center said, “These two imperiled North Carolina species aren’t found anywhere else on Earth, so they need protecting now before it’s too late.”

Fish and Wildlife has a year to act on the proposal.