



ENDANGERED SPECIES

Listing sought for vomiting salamander, poisonous catfish

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter
Tuesday, May 21, 2019

Pushed by litigation, the Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed extending Endangered Species Act protections to the Neuse River waterdog and the Carolina madtom.

The Neuse River waterdog is an aquatic salamander. The Carolina madtom is a freshwater fish. Both species live, vulnerably, in North Carolina.

The waterdog would be designated as threatened and the madtom would be identified as endangered, under a proposal set for publication tomorrow in the Federal Register. The listings include critical habitat spanning 738 river miles for the salamander and 257 river miles for the fish.

In their own way, both species are distinctive but not necessarily lovable characters.

The reddish-brown and black-spotted Neuse River waterdog eats large aquatic arthropods, invertebrates and the occasional small fish.

“All prey are ingested whole, and larger items are sometimes regurgitated and then reswallowed,” the Fish and Wildlife Service noted.



A Carolina madtom. D. Biggins/FWS

A medium-sized catfish, the bottom-dwelling Carolina madtom has a wide black stripe along its side and danger in its spines.

“The Carolina madtom is the most strongly armed of the North American catfishes with stinging spines containing a potent poison in their pectoral fins,” FWS stated.

The new ESA listing decisions have roots in a 2010 petition from the Center for Biological Diversity and others to list 404 aquatic species in the southeastern United States, including the waterdog and madtom. A lawsuit subsequently ensued.

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

FWS determined the largest threats to the future viability of both species involve habitat degradation related to water quality and quantity, instream habitat, and habitat connectivity.

“All of these factors are exacerbated by the effects of climate change,” the agency observed.

Still, the waterdog’s relatively spread-out populations led FWS officials to conclude that, unlike the madtom, the former is not currently in danger of extinction throughout all of its range though it’s “likely” to become so over the next 50 years.

Following what’s become a favored approach by the Trump administration, FWS is also proposing a “4(d) rule” for the waterdog’s ESA listing that would permit certain actions that might otherwise be more tightly regulated (Greenwire, Feb. 26).

Certain silvicultural, forest management and stream channel improvement practices would be permitted under the proposal.

“These provisions can encourage cooperation by landowners and other affected parties in implementing conservation measures,” FWS said. “This will allow for use of the land while at the same time ensuring the preservation of suitable habitat and minimizing impact on the species.”