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From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

Mississippi  
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Jackson: A rare snake has won protection in two states under a critical habitat lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said Tuesday. As a result of the suit, the wildlife service said 325,679 acres of critical habitat in Mississippi and Alabama will be protected for the rare black pinesnake, which can grow up to 7 feet in length.

Critical habitat protection means federal agencies must consult with the wildlife service for any federally funded or permitted projects to make sure activities don't hurt the pinesnake or its habitat. "This will help give these elegant snakes the space and safety they need to survive," said Elise Bennett, an attorney for the center. The new rule will protect eight units of critical habitat, including occupied areas in Forrest, George, Greene, Harrison, Jones, Marion, Perry, Stone and Wayne counties in Mississippi and in Clarke County, Alabama. These areas are already home to pinesnakes and contain crucial habitat features such as deep, sandy soils, unfragmented pine forest and safe refuges.