

<https://www.ksdk.com/article/sports/outdoors/missouri-eastern-hellbender-endangered-species/63-ffaaf0ca-bd17-42bd-9fd9-0f452eedfe4f>

Missouri's eastern hellbender salamanders get endangered species protections

Eastern hellbenders are North America's largest salamanders, and river-dwelling hellbenders can grow more than 2 feet long

Author: Corey Miller

Published: 3:46 PM CST March 8, 2021

Updated: 4:06 PM CST March 8, 2021

MISSOURI, USA — The Missouri population of North America's largest salamanders now have greater protection.

On Monday, the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) designated the Missouri distinct population of the [eastern hellbender salamander](#) as an endangered population under the federal Endangered Species Act, per a release from the [Center for Biological Diversity](#).

The center had filed a notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if the animals were not given the protection.

"While we're happy to see the Missouri population of eastern hellbenders receive protection, the Service should have listed the species throughout its range," said Brian Segee, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "Hellbenders desperately need the protections of the Endangered Species Act not only in Missouri, but everywhere they're found."

Eastern hellbenders are North America's largest salamanders, and river-dwelling hellbenders can grow more than 2 feet long. The Center for Biological Diversity said the species has been eliminated from much of its habitat due to sedimentation, dam construction, disease, habitat destruction and climate change.

The Missouri distinct population can be found in the east-central part of the state.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the salamanders can be found in the Big River, Big Piney River, Courtois Creek, Gasconade River, Huzzah Creek, Meramec River, Niangua River and the Osage Fork of the Gasconade River.

According to the center, in the last 20 years populations of Missouri eastern hellbenders have declined as much as 77% in the Big Piney River, Gasconade River and Niangua River. The population is expected to continue to decline.