

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
18th and C Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

January 6, 2010

Copies via e-mail: feedback@ios.doi.gov and Steve_Spangle@fws.gov.

Dear Secretary Salazar:

The undersigned organizations respectfully request that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designate critical habitat for endangered jaguars and develop a recovery plan. Although both actions are clearly required by the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service has maintained that designation of critical habitat in the United States and development of a recovery plan are not practical because so much of the jaguar's range occurs outside the U.S.

Recently, a federal judge rejected both of these positions and ordered the Service to reconsider designation of critical habitat and development of a recovery plan. Moreover, the American Society of Mammalogists described jaguar habitat in the U.S. as "vital to the long-term resilience and survival of the species," and urged the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a recovery plan and designate critical habitat for the jaguar. We ask that you heed the advice of scientists and take the court's order as an opportunity to chart a new course for recovery of the jaguar in the U.S.

Although the precise size and extent of historic jaguar populations in the U.S. are unknown, it is well accepted that the big cats ranged from California to at least as far east as Louisiana, including most or all of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, and as far north as the Grand Canyon. The Service should designate critical habitat in these states based on available information on the habitat needs of the jaguar. According to the Service, "javelina and deer are presumably mainstays in the diet of jaguars in the United States and Mexico Borderlands," and in Arizona, most jaguar records "were from Madrean evergreen-woodland, shrub invaded semi-desert grassland, and along rivers." The Service also concluded that "jaguar prey populations have increased, and large tracts of brush and canyon woodland are still available to provide cover for jaguars."¹

Based on this and more recent information, we request that the Service designate critical habitat in the species' historic range including in areas with abundant populations of javelina and deer, riparian areas, and shrublands with sparse human populations. Such areas occupy large tracts of the Southwest into east Texas and Louisiana. Indeed, recent studies carried out by the interagency "Jaguar Conservation Team" identified and mapped millions of acres of potential jaguar habitat in Arizona and New Mexico alone.²

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1997. Endangered and threatened wildlife and plants: final rule to extend endangered status for the jaguar in the United States. Federal Register 62: 39147; July 22, 1997.

² Van Pelt, W.E. 2006. Potential jaguar habitat in Arizona and New Mexico: Summary of work and recommendations of the Jaguar Habitat Subcommittee for the Jaguar Conservation Team. Hatten, J.R., A. Averill-

The Service has maintained that it cannot develop a recovery plan for the jaguar in the U.S. because recovery plans must include delisting criteria for the listed entity, which in this case includes jaguars across their entire range in the U.S., Mexico and down through South America. Contrary to this assertion, the Endangered Species Act does not require that a single recovery plan be developed for the species as a whole, but rather allows for multiple recovery plans to be developed to cover portions of a listed entity's range and that these plans need not be developed concurrently. Indeed, the Service has utilized just such an approach for a number of widely distributed species, including the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, gray wolf and others. Thus, it would be possible to develop a recovery plan focusing on the jaguar in the U.S. now, allowing additional time for the multinational coordination effort required to develop a recovery plan for the whole species in the future.

Recovery of the jaguar in the U.S. could contribute to the conservation of southwestern ecosystems. Like other top-predators, jaguars help control populations of their prey and keep them on the move, thereby reducing over grazing and browsing. Jaguars also provide carrion for scavenging animals, such as bears, eagles and condors. Above all else, recovering jaguars—beautiful animals whose ongoing decline is due to habitat loss and shortsighted human persecution—is the right thing to do.

More broadly, affirming the roles of recovery planning and critical habitat designation in conservation of species that range beyond the United States recognizes that natural ecosystems are not contained by borders, and affirms the vital promise of the Endangered Species Act that our generation of humanity will not bequeath an impoverished world to future generations. For all of these reasons, we urge you to take recovery of the jaguar in a new direction and designate critical habitat and develop a recovery plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Murray, and W.E. Van Pelt. 2002. Characterizing and mapping potential jaguar habitat in Arizona. Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program Technical Report 203. Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, Arizona.
Menke, K.A. and C.L. Hayes. 2003. Evaluation of the relative suitability of potential jaguar habitat in New Mexico. New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Robinson, M.J. 2006. Habitat for jaguars in New Mexico. Contract report to Arizona Game and Fish Department. Center for Biological Diversity. Silver City, New Mexico.

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