



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Arizona Ecological Services Office

2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103

Phoenix, Arizona 85021-4951

Telephone: (602) 242-0210 Fax: (602) 242-2513



In reply refer to:

AESO/SE

November 7, 2011

Re: Pre-proposal Notification and Information Request for the Northern Mexican Gartersnake (*Thamnophis eques megalops*) and Narrow-headed Gartersnake (*T. rufipunctatus*)

Dear Interested Parties and Agencies:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for identifying species that are in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973 as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544 et seq.). We have begun the preparation of a proposed rule to list the northern Mexican gartersnake as threatened or endangered and designate proposed critical habitat. We have also acquired information indicating the narrow-headed gartersnake may need protection afforded by the Act. Consequently, we are also evaluating whether the status of the narrow-headed gartersnake meets the definition of threatened or endangered under the Act. If so, we anticipate proposing a combined rule to list both species as threatened or endangered throughout their range and designating proposed critical habitat. We expect to publish a proposed rule package in the *Federal Register* in November 2012.

In the United States, the northern Mexican gartersnake was historically found in the Santa Cruz, San Pedro, Colorado, Gila, Salt, Agua Fria, Rio Yaqui, and Verde river watersheds in Arizona, in addition to the upper Gila and San Francisco headwater streams in western Grant and Hidalgo counties in New Mexico. Within Mexico, northern Mexican gartersnakes historically occurred within the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Mexican Plateau in the Mexican states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Nayarit, Hidalgo, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, Aguascalientes, Tlaxacala, Puebla, México, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and Querétaro. The narrow-headed gartersnake was historically distributed within perennial drainages across the Mogollon Rim from northern and eastern Arizona, southeast into southwestern New Mexico.

An opportunity for formal comments will be available when a proposal is published in the *Federal Register*. However, in the interest of incorporating the best available information as early as possible in this process, we currently seek specific information on the status of these gartersnakes and of their biological communities. Nonnative species (spiny fin-rayed fish or catfish, bullfrogs, and crayfish) competition and predation pose the most significant threat to the continued existence of these gartersnakes. We specifically seek information on the status of the nonnative community within the historical or current distribution of these gartersnakes. We have created (in Microsoft Word) pre-populated tables for each species for your review which are available on our website at the links below.

Northern Mexican Gartersnake: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/MexGartersnake.htm>

Narrow-headed Gartersnake: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/N-HGartersnake.htm>

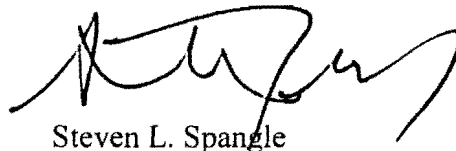
Please review these tables for accuracy, update any missing or incorrect information using "track changes," and e-mail amended tables to jeff_servoss@fws.gov. If you wish to provide further comment on your recommended edits, please insert that discussion in each document.

We are also seeking any reports or records substantiating the status of these snakes, their habitat, conservation, and threats such as: (A) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of their habitat or range; (B) overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (C) disease or predation; (D) the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or (E) other natural or manmade factors affecting their continued existence.

For maximum benefit to our decision-making process, we hope to receive your response no later than **December 31, 2011**.

If you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Jeff Servoss in our Tucson suboffice at (520) 670-6150 (x231) or Scott Richardson (x242). We are grateful for your assistance in this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven L. Spangle", written in a cursive style.

Steven L. Spangle

cc (electronic):

Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, NM (Attn: Sarah Quamme)
Assistant Field Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, Tucson, AZ
Assistant Field Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, Flagstaff, AZ
Public Outreach Specialist, Fish and Wildlife Service, Phoenix, AZ