

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ENDANGERED SPECIES "ENCLAVES" PROPOSED

The concept of "critical habitat" or living space needed by each animal listed as an endangered or threatened species in the United States has been published in the Federal Register by the Interior and Commerce Departments. This move will result in the designation of critical habitat areas and the identification of actions which can or cannot take place on these lands or waters.

This project is a major step forward in the fight to save and restore endangered or threatened fish and wildlife. The identification of those areas is sorely needed by Federal, State, and local government agencies who operate on lands or waters inhabited by endangered or threatened wildlife.

Federal, State, and local government agencies plus all interested private individuals and organizations are invited to participate in this process by submitting information or maps that would assist in delineating the critical habitat of those species on the official list of endangered or threatened species. Concerned parties also may choose to recommend specific kinds of actions they feel should be allowed or disallowed in those areas. Information should be sent to either the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240, or the Director, National Marine Fisheries Service, Washington, D.C. 20235.

The term "habitat" could be considered to consist of the spatial environment where a species lives. It includes all elements of that environment--land and water areas, physical structure and topography, flora, fauna, climate, human activity, and the quality and chemical content of soil, water, and air.

"Critical habitat" could be the entire habitat or any portion of it necessary to the normal needs or survival of a species.

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The following vital needs are relevant in determining critical habitat for a given species:

- (1) space for normal growth, movements, or territorial behavior;
- (2) nutritional requirements, such as food, water, minerals;
- (3) sites for breeding, reproduction, or rearing of offspring;
- (4) cover or shelter; or
- (5) other biological, physical, or behavioral requirements.

Federal conservation actions involving critical habitats may include the development of regulations, land and water acquisition, leasing arrangements, Federal/State cooperation in implementing the Act, and other administrative, research, and management plans and activities.

Officials emphasized that the primary intention of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service under the Endangered Species Act is to protect, maintain, and restore presently endangered and threatened species. Areas outside the present range of a species having a potential for affecting a population may also be designated as critical. They emphasized further that there may be many kinds of actions which can be carried out within the critical habitat of a species that would not reduce its numbers, distribution, or otherwise adversely affect it.

As sufficient information on critical habitat is gathered for each of the species now listed, the Fish and Wildlife Service and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service will publish proposed rulemakings in the Federal Register. These rulemakings will identify spatial environments, including geographical boundaries where possible, considered to be critical habitat for the species in question. The procedure will permit all Federal agencies to evaluate their programs for compliance with the Endangered Species Act before a final rulemaking. The Act requires Federal agencies to avoid any actions that would destroy or adversely modify any critical habitat. All agencies are encouraged to seek the consultation and assistance of the Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce and to use their authorities to further the purposes of the Act.

At least 60 days will be allowed for comments and alternative recommendations before publication of a final rulemaking on any specific designation of critical habitat. The Governors of States, territories, and possessions where critical habitat is to be designated normally will be given at least 90 days notification.

In the future, as new candidate species for the endangered or threatened classification are proposed in the Federal Register, each proposal, as appropriate, will contain a proposed designation of critical habitat for that species.

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