

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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ALABAMA SALAMANDER ADDED TO THREATENED LIST

The Red Hills salamander, a dark brown, seven-inch amphibian which inhabits the moist, cool forest floors of south central Alabama, has become the first amphibian to be placed on the U.S. list of "threatened" species, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

Its entire geographic range is confined to a hilly 60,000-acre area where it inhabits burrows in forested ravines shaded by tall hardwood trees. There the forest floor is moist and relatively cool, and the spiders, millipedes, and other invertebrate life which make up the bulk of the salamander's diet are abundant.

Clearcutting, and replanting with mechanical techniques, have in the past destroyed or seriously altered more than 10 percent of the species' available habitat. Approximately 60 percent of the remaining habitat is currently owned or leased by paper companies. The remainder, most of which is in private ownership, also is subject to alteration.

The salamander is not found on slopes where 100 percent of tree cover has been removed, or on which mechanical or hand planting of pine trees has followed heavy cutting, but spotty populations are found on slopes that have been heavily cut but not clearcut. Today, clearcutting and mechanical planting on slopes are seldom practiced; most timber companies now prefer "marking out" bluffs and steep slopes--habitat most favorable

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to the Red Hills salamander. This type of forest management allows selective harvesting while maintaining viable salamander populations as long as extensive removal of the tree canopy is avoided.

Overcollecting for commercial and scientific purposes also appears to have contributed to the decline of the species.

The species was originally proposed for the U.S. "endangered" list on October 1, 1975, and comments, suggestions, and factual information were solicited from interested persons. As a result of the evidence received and consideration given by landowners, the species has been found not to be in as eminent danger as was previously feared and has been determined to be a threatened rather than an endangered species. The threatened classification allows for more flexible Federal-State management efforts to improve a species' status. It requires all Federal agencies to consider the welfare of the species in any actions they authorize, fund, or carry out without imposing the total protection required by an endangered classification.

The United States now officially lists over 25 threatened species and 609 endangered species worldwide; 170 of them are located within the boundaries of the United States and its territories. A half dozen amphibians are already on the endangered list.

The listing of the Red Hills salamander as threatened, which becomes effective January 3, 1977, gives the species the protection afforded by the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

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