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**Rare Fish Receive Endangered Species Act Safeguards**  
*Two Imperiled Grouper Species Now Protected*

Washington, DC—Today, in response to a petition by WildEarth Guardians, the National Marine Fisheries Service (Service) protected the imperiled island grouper (*Mycteroperca fusca*) and gulf grouper (*Mycteroperca jordani*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The gulf grouper is now listed as endangered and the island grouper is listed as threatened. The listings give both grouper species much-needed legal protections from fishing, bycatch, pollution, and other threats.

“We’re thrilled that island and gulf groupers are now safeguarded by the powerful protections of the Endangered Species Act,” said Taylor Jones, endangered species advocate for WildEarth Guardians. “These rare species need a chance to recover from decades of overfishing and habitat destruction.”

Gulf groupers can grow to close to five feet in length and live nearly 50 years. Like most other species of grouper, gulf groupers mature as females and later transition into males after growing to a large size. Their only known spawning grounds are in the Gulf of California, where they group together to breed before and during the full moon in May. They live mainly in rocky reefs and kelp beds. The gulf grouper fishery collapsed in the late 1960s, declining to nearly zero groupers caught by 1970. Continued fishing, damming and pollution of rivers that feed Gulf of California estuaries, commercial shrimp farms that destroy important mangrove nursery habitat, dredging, and coastal construction threaten groupers.

Island groupers are smaller fish that can reach three feet in length and live 30 to 40 years. Island groupers call subtropical waters near shore in the Canary Islands, Madeira, Azores, and Cape Verde home. Island groupers, like many grouper species, are very susceptible to overfishing since they gather predictably in groups to spawn. Coastal development, dynamite fishing, and pollution threaten their rocky marine habitat.

“The Endangered Species Act is a proven tool for preventing extinction and aiding imperiled species on the path to recovery, yet it is underused in protecting imperiled marine species and habitats,” said Jones. “Endangered Species Act protections provide the island grouper and gulf grouper the best possible chance to survive and recover.”

Guardians submitted a petition to list 81 marine species and subpopulations, including the two groupers, under the ESA in July of 2013 due to significant threats to our oceans. An estimated 50 to 80 percent of all life on earth is found in the oceans. More than half of marine species may be at risk of extinction by 2100 without significant conservation efforts. Despite this grave situation, the U.S. largely fails to protect marine species under the ESA. Of the more than 2,200 species protected

under the Act, only approximately six percent are marine species. Recognizing the decline of ocean health, on July 22, 2010, President Obama issued an Executive Order requiring agencies, including the Service, to “protect, maintain, and restore the health and biological diversity of ocean... ecosystems,” and to “use the best available science and knowledge to inform decisions affecting the ocean.” Guardians’ multi-species marine petition seeks to compel the Service to live up to this mandate.

Protection under the ESA is an effective safety net for imperiled species: more than 99 percent of plants and animals protected by the law exist today. The law is especially important as a defense against the current extinction crisis; species are disappearing at a rate much higher than the natural rate of extinction due to human activities. Scientists estimate that 227 species would have gone extinct by 2006 if not for ESA protections. Listing species with international or global distribution can both protect the species domestically, and help focus U.S. resources toward enforcement of international regulation and recovery of the species.

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