



**Forest Guardians
Southwest Imperiled Species Endangered Species Act Listing Petition
Questions & Answers
June 2007**

Q: Why petition for more than one species at a time?

A: There is overwhelming scientific consensus that we are in the midst of an extinction crisis, the sixth in the history of the earth. This human-induced “Sixth Extinction” is marked by extinction rates up to 1,000 times the natural background rate of extinction. While Forest Guardians and other conservation groups have submitted single species listing petitions in the past, the rate of petitioning and listing is not keeping pace with the rate of species imperilment. Approximately 6,000-9,000 U.S. species are likely imperiled, roughly four to seven times more than the current Endangered Species Act (ESA) list. The rate at which endangered species are formally protected under the ESA simply must increase in order to address the extinction crisis. It is also important to recognize multiple species petitions that precede this one. In 1974, the Smithsonian submitted a petition to list 3,187 plants. In 2004, the Center for Biological Diversity and others submitted a petition to list 225 plant and animal species.

Q: How does this petition address the extinction crisis?

A: The ESA is one of the most powerful biodiversity statutes in the world. Over 99% of the species listed under it have been spared from extinction. This law must be fully implemented to address the extinction crisis by bringing species in need under its legal protection. A range of human activities is endangering native plants, animals, and ecosystems, including habitat destruction, exploitation, pollution, proliferation of non-native species, introduced diseases, and a climate crisis caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions. These activities would be better regulated if the Service accounted for all imperiled species with a more comprehensive listing program. Mass listing is also required to update the ESA’s enforcement with the current science on vanishing species.

Q: Why are these species important?

A: Native plants and animals possess a range of values, including utilitarian, ecological, aesthetic, symbolic, recreational, spiritual, ethical, and scientific. Many of the species in this 475-species petition are plants and invertebrates, which play a range of important ecological roles and are often indicators for the health of ecosystems they inhabit. Plants provide a treasure trove of medicines, including the rosy periwinkle, which is used to treat leukemia. In addition, Congress recognized the moral imperative of preventing species extinction when it passed the ESA in 1973. That sense of moral duty is broadly

shared, as concern for future generations is a leading reason for American support for environmental protection.

Q: Won't this petition overstretch the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

A: No: all they have to do is say yes. The process of listing these species could be very efficient, with multiple species bundled together in single listing rules. What the Service is worried about is that they'd actually have to protect these species once they are listed. Despite being imbued with responsibility for protecting our nation's wildlife and plants, this agency continually panders to industry and makes species listings more difficult - nearly impossible - due to a political agenda. Moreover, the Bush Administration asks Congress to starve this law of funds for listing and has increased the expense of listing. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, while 30 species were listed per million dollars in 1997, only 2.4 species have been listed per million dollars under George W. Bush. In recent years, the listing and critical habitat budget has averaged only \$15 million, despite the Service's acknowledgement that as much as \$153 million is necessary to address the backlog of candidate species awaiting ESA listing. This petition seeks to elevate the discourse on funding for listing - it must increase by orders of magnitude to fully implement the ESA and stem the extinction crisis.

Q: How will the listing influence the economy?

A: The ESA provides an early warning system identifying unsustainability of human activities, which are unraveling the tapestry of life. A comprehensive listing program would help curtail ecologically unsustainable practices and promote the transition to an economy based on long-term ecological health. In the American southwest, damaging activities threatening native species include livestock grazing; logging; oil and gas extraction; mining; off-road vehicle use; use of herbicides and pesticides; over-hunting and fishing; road-building; urban sprawl; and water use, diversion, and contamination. Climate change and the spread of exotic species resulting from human activities can also be partly addressed through listing these 475 species. In addition, endangered species protection can provide substantial economic benefits. For example, wolf-related tourism in Yellowstone National Park infuses about \$35 million annually into local economies.

Q: Where is the science in this petition?

A: In the past we have submitted lengthy, single species listing petitions, yet the Fish and Wildlife Service has dragged its heels on listing species we have demonstrated warrant listing. Many of our petitions advocated a focal species approach, which uses proxy species - such as highly interactive or umbrella species - to safeguard whole ecosystems. While paying lip service to the wisdom of ecosystem protection, the Service has sabotaged the ESA by refusing to bring obviously imperiled keystone species - such as prairie dogs - under the law's protections. Recently resigned Interior official Julie MacDonald was caught red-handed corrupting the science on listing determinations despite the law's standard that such decisions be made solely on the basis of the best available science. This petition shifts gears by proceeding from a scientific source that the Service recognizes as authoritative: NatureServe. Extensive scientific analysis provides the basis for NatureServe's classification of native plants and wildlife as critically

imperiled or imperiled. NatureServe represents the best available science for these species. We are asking the Service to act on this best available science.

Q: Is this a modest proposal?

A: Yes: this petition seeks to reclaim lost ground, given the Service's elimination of over 2,000 candidate species in 1996. It is also conservative in requesting protection only for full species, critically imperiled species, and only in the southwest region of the U.S. We could have included all critically imperiled, imperiled, and vulnerable species across the U.S., which would have amounted to 9,000 species, less those already listed under the ESA. However, with our more cautious approach, we advocate that the Service pursue protection for the most at-risk species first and proceed with a region-based approach to reign in the extinction crisis across the U.S.

For full discussion and citations on the above information, contact Dr. Nicole Rosmarino at 505-988-9126x156 or nrosmarino@fguardians.org for Forest Guardians'

"PETITION TO LIST ALL CRITICALLY IMPERILED OR IMPERILED SPECIES IN THE SOUTHWEST AS THREATENED OR ENDANGERED UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT," SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ON JUNE 18, 2007.

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