

FY98 R5 Sensitive Species List Revision Process for Animals

Our revision was based upon two international lists and one state-level list of rare species. The international lists are The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Natural Heritage Database, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) list of candidate and proposed species for protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). These lists are highly credible and broadly accepted throughout the world, providing a logical basis to begin our assessment of species at risk in the Pacific Southwest Region. We also have an obligation to assist states in the conservation of rare species. To that end, we incorporated California's list of Threatened and Endangered Species into our process.

The basis for the sensitive species list revision described above is recommended nationally by many federal agencies to ensure clarity and consistency in determining which species are of national concern, and provide a means for intra-agency consistency between regions of the Forest Service. The results of the screening process differ from earlier methods for identifying species of interest due to a focus on rarity throughout the range of a species rather than one agency's, one region's, or one Forest's portion of the range. These range-wide considerations forms the basis for the Regional Forester's list of sensitive species. Species of more local concern, such as those at the geographical extremes of an otherwise broad range, should be dealt with at the local forest level, using the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) viability regulations [16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(B) and 36 CFR 219.19].

To be included on this first update in 14 years to the list of sensitive animal species, we required that Forest Service management activities have a potential effect on the species and their habitats. Sufficient information also had to be available on habitat relationships, life history, etc. to allow evaluation of potential effects.

STEP 1. Begin with all animals in TNC's Natural Heritage Database that occur in California. Select those ranked G (1,2,3), N (1,2,3), or T (1,2,3). Add FWS and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Candidate and Proposed species.

We reviewed over 585 animals from the above sampling universe using available data and scientific expertise. Those species that occurred on National Forest System (NFS) lands in California, or were likely to occur based upon distribution, range, and presence of suitable habitat were identified. The animal evaluation form was completed for each of these species. Reasons for not designating species as Regional Forester Sensitive were documented on the form as appropriate. The Regional Office Program Managers for TES, Fisheries, and Aquatic Invertebrates made the final determinations.

STEP 2. Evaluate animals on the California list of Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species.

California T&E species that were not captured in STEP 1 were added here. We reviewed each of these species to determine whether they or their habitats were likely to occur on NFS lands. For those that did occur, the animal evaluation form was completed to determine whether sensitive status was warranted.

STEP 3. Validate R5's current list of Sensitive Animal Species (1984 origination) and subsequent updates.

Species on the current Regional Forester's List that did not meet STEP 1 or STEP 2 criteria were reviewed. We completed the evaluation form to document rationale for maintaining or deleting those species from the list.

STEP 4. Evaluate animals that were not on any of the above lists, but were suspected to warrant sensitive species management to ensure continued viability.

Forests and the Pacific Southwest Research Station nominated species that fit into this category, and provided evaluation forms to document their reasoning. Some nominees were newly described taxa, or species for which local experts have not entered data on the international lists, or had other causes for concern. They were evaluated against species from STEPS one through three. The completed evaluation forms document the logic for addition to the list of R5 Sensitive Species.

STEP 5. Coordinate and validate the resulting list with neighboring Forest Service Regions (3, 4, and 6), and the Washington, D.C. office.

We coordinated to attempt agreement about how discrepancies in data, status, trends, and listing could be resolved.

STEP 6. For species with insufficient information to determine whether they should be Sensitive, we created a list of species requiring more information for future listing consideration.*

A number of species from our source lists lacked basic information necessary to determine occurrence on NFS lands and/or effects of management activities at even the most cursory level. These species will receive further consideration as more information becomes available for evaluation.

STEP 7. Encourage forests to establish a "Watch List".

A number of animals species reviewed for the list revision did not meet the criteria to be included on the Regional Forester's Sensitive List, but are of more localized concern and need to be considered in the planning process. These include species that are locally rare (as opposed to declining throughout their range), are of public concern, occur as disjunct populations, are newly described taxa, lack sufficient information on population size, threats, trend, or distribution, etc. These species make an important contribution to forest biodiversity and should be maintained under the provisions of NFMA, and addressed as appropriate through the National Forest Policy Act (NEPA) process. Forests are encouraged to establish and maintain a "Watch List" of such species.

* The TNC Natural Heritage Database used in our FY98 update contained 165 terrestrial invertebrate species. We had no available source of information adequate to attempt evaluation at this time. We anticipate initiating an evaluation of these species for potential inclusion on the list in FY99.