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Review Finds Endangered Species Protection May Be Warranted for Two Bat Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced the eastern small-footed and northern long-eared bats may warrant federal protection as threatened or endangered species, following an initial review of a petition seeking to protect the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Service will initiate a more thorough status review for both bats to determine whether these species should be added to the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife.

The eastern small-footed bat occurs from eastern Canada and New England south to Alabama and Georgia and west to Oklahoma. Eastern small-footed bats are believed to be rare throughout their range, although they are more common in the northern than in the southern United States.

The northern long-eared bat occurs across much of the eastern and north-central United States and across all Canadian provinces west to the southern Northwest Territories and eastern British Columbia, although the species is variably distributed and rarely found in large numbers.

On January 21, 2010, the Service received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity requesting that the two species of bats be listed as threatened or endangered and that critical habitat be designated under the ESA.

Information in the petition and in the Service's files indicates that the continued existence of one or both of these species may be threatened by several factors, including habitat destruction and degradation, disturbance of hibernation areas and maternity roosts, and impacts related to white-nose

syndrome, a deadly disease that has killed more than 1 million cave-hibernating bats since its discovery in 2006. Existing regulations of these activities may be inadequate to protect the two species.

Today's decision, commonly known as a 90-day petition finding, is based on scientific and commercial information about the species provided in the petition requesting protection of the species under the ESA. The petition finding does not mean that the Service has decided it is appropriate to protect the eastern small-footed and northern long-eared bats under the ESA. Rather, this finding is the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review of all the biological information available. The finding will publish in the *Federal Register* on June 29, 2011.

The Service is particularly looking for information on distribution, status, population size or trends; life history; and threats to these species. Information may be submitted using one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. [FWS-R5-ES-2011-0024].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. [FWS-R5-ES-2011-0024]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before August 29, 2011. The Service will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process. The Service is not able to accept email or faxes.

In addition, the Service is proactively collecting information on several other bat species believed to be susceptible to white-nose syndrome to determine if, in addition to existing threats, the disease may be increasing the extinction risk of these species. These species include the little brown bat, big brown bat, tri-colored bat (eastern pipistrelle), cave myotis and southeastern myotis.

Learn more about the eastern small-footed bat at <http://www.tn.gov/twra/tnbwg/eastsmallfootbat.html> and the northern long-eared bat at <http://www.tn.gov/twra/tnbwg/northlongearbat.html>.

For more information about white-nose syndrome, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/>.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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