



# News Release

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## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WILL NOT PROPOSE LISTING THE NORTHERN MEXICAN GARTERSNAKE**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that a petition to list the northern Mexican gartersnake, a subspecies found in the southwestern United States and in Mexico, does not present substantial information to indicate that listing under the Endangered Species Act may be warranted. The negative petition finding was published in today's *Federal Register*.

The Service made this determination in response to a petition received in December 2003 from the Center for Biological Diversity to list the northern Mexican gartersnake as a threatened or endangered species. Under the Act, the Service is required to review a petition to decide whether it contains substantial scientific information that a species may warrant listing. Today's decision is based on a lack of information about the status of and threats to the subspecies in Mexico, which represents the majority of its historical distribution.

"The northern Mexican gartersnake may face significant threats in the United States; however, our finding that it doesn't warrant Endangered Species Act protection is based on a lack of information on its status throughout its broader range in Mexico," said Steve Spangle, Arizona Field Supervisor.

Northern Mexican gartersnake populations in Arizona and New Mexico have declined as a result of introduced nonnative bullfrogs, crayfish, and nonnative fish that prey upon, or compete with, the northern Mexican gartersnake and its native prey species. Efforts to control nonnative gartersnake predators and restore their native prey base could do much to bolster domestic populations of gartersnakes and a suite of other Southwest species. General habitat loss is also of concern.

The northern Mexican gartersnake can grow to 44 inches, is olive colored and has three stripes that run the length of the body with a yellow stripe down the back that darkens toward the tail. A light-colored crescent extends behind the corners of its mouth. Northern Mexican gartersnakes are difficult to distinguish from other gartersnake species. Northern Mexican gartersnakes live in dense vegetation along the banks or in the shallows of wetlands (ciénegas and stock tanks) and streamside woodlands. They feed mainly in water on native fish and frogs and sometimes on earthworms, lizards and small rodents.

Historically, the snake lived in perennial rivers, intermittent streams and isolated wetlands throughout the southern half of Arizona, extreme western New Mexico and is associated with the Sierra Madre Occidental and Mexican Plateau in Mexico which represents approximately 70 to 80 percent of its historical distribution. Information on the subspecies in Mexico would be required before making a scientific assertion that the subspecies warrants Endangered Species Act protection.

The current distribution of the northern Mexican gartersnake within the United States is believed to be constrained to the middle/upper Verde River drainage, middle/lower Tonto Creek, and the Cienega Creek drainage as well as in a small number of isolated wetland habitats in southeastern Arizona. The subspecies' current distribution in Mexico is less certain although the Mexican gartersnake is listed as threatened throughout Mexico by the Mexican government. Although once found in New Mexico, the species probably no longer exists there.

Information regarding northern Mexican gartersnake status or its habitat should continue to be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, Arizona 85021-4951 or emailed to [MexGsnakeComments@fws.gov](mailto:MexGsnakeComments@fws.gov).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov>.

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