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Endangered Species Act Protection Not Needed for Four Southeastern Animals

Responding to requests to add them to the Federal threatened and endangered species list, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded that the sicklefin redhorse, dwarf angular crayfish, Icebox Cave beetle, and Clifton Cave beetle do not need such protection.

“Rarity alone is not sufficient to place a plant or animal on the endangered species list. To receive Endangered Species Act protection, the species must be facing threats that would cause extinction or endangerment in the foreseeable future,” said Leo Miranda, assistant regional director for the Service’s southeast region. “All four animals have very limited global distributions, but either face little to no apparent threats or are the focus of ongoing conservation efforts enabling them to overcome threats.”

Previous reviews found that three of the animals, the sicklefin redhorse and two cave beetles, warranted inclusion on the list, but doing so was precluded by higher-priority species. With this decision, the Service has revisited those species, taking into account recent conservation efforts, species abundance, and changes in threats. This decision marks the first time the Service has considered the dwarf angular crayfish for the endangered species list.

- Sicklefin redhorse (*Moxostoma* sp.) – Though long recognized by the Cherokee, this fish was discovered by science in the early 1990s. It occurs only Swain, Jackson, Macon, Clay, and Cherokee counties, North Carolina and Towns County, Georgia. For several years, it has been the subject of a focused conservation effort by the Service, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and Conservation Fisheries, Inc. An agreement signed earlier this year formalized the partnership and brought in the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Duke Energy, and the Tennessee Valley Authority.
- Dwarf angular crayfish (*Cambarellus lesliei*) – Typically measuring less than an inch long, this is one of the smallest crayfishes in the northern hemisphere. It’s found in heavily-vegetated ponds, sluggish streams, and backwater areas in Baldwin, Mobile, and Washington counties, Alabama, and George County, Mississippi. Though little is known about the crayfish, its habitat is abundant, and there’s no indication that it faces any significant threats.
- Clifton Cave beetle (*Pseudanophthalmus caecus*) – This beetle is known from only two caves in Woodford County, Kentucky. It was discovered in 1963, in Clifton Cave, after an opening to the previously unknown cave was inadvertently created during road construction. That opening was closed in the mid-1960s, likely preventing any direct human impact to the beetles. Four individuals were discovered in nearby Richardson’s Spring Cave in 1994, where several beetles were seen in 2015. The caves are in a rural landscape with no significant threats to the beetle.
- Icebox Cave beetle (*Pseudanophthalmus frigidus*) – This beetle was discovered in 1963 in Icebox Cave, Bell County, Kentucky – its only known location. Search efforts in 2015 found the beetle persisting in the cave at numbers consistent with previous searches. Although the cave shows evidence of human use and visitation, in recent years it seems to have remained largely untouched. This cave is also in a rural landscape with no significant threats to the beetle.

The Endangered Species Act allows anyone to petition the Service to include a species on the endangered species list. The decisions on these four animals come as the Service works through hundreds such requests that have come from outside groups in recent years, with the Service taking a two-pronged approach of evaluating the petitions as required by law and also emphasizing conserving plants and animals before they need the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

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