

Choosing Species of Conservation Concern

USDA Forest Service, the Southern Region
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[1] *SCC Defined.* Species of Conservation Concern [SCC] must be native species, known to occur in the planning unit, and for which the best available scientific information indicates a substantial concern for persistence in the planning area.

[a] A native species. A native species is an organism historically present in an ecosystem as a result of natural migratory or evolutionary processes, and not as a result of an accidental or deliberate introduction.

Native species should also be recognized species. Please avoid informal taxa, typically identified by English appellations such as 'Species 1' or 'Population A.' Nomenclature should follow NatureServe.

[b] Known to occur in the planning unit. In general, we interpret known to occur as a reasonably current Element Occurrence [EO] on the forest. Please avoid species that are known only from historical records, or for which the best available science leads to a conclusion that the species is no longer present. There is no definite standard for when EOs become historical, but, as EOs become more historical, they are less likely to meet the 'known to occur' criterion.

[c] Substantial concern for persistence in the planning area. Please keep in mind that the standard is 'substantial' concern. We believe this is best demonstrated by some combination of threats (either directly to the species or indirectly to its characteristic habitat), declines in the sizes and/or numbers of its populations, and/or declines in its habitat.

Persistence is defined as continued existence (36 CFR 219.19). We believe the implication is for persistence in ecological time, which is the time period associated with ecological processes, ranging from dispersal and competition on the shorter end, to forest succession on the longer end – so longer than the forest planning cycle, but bounded by processes that can be addressed through ecological analyses.

[2] *Criteria for SCC Consideration.* FSH 1909.19, section 12.52, identifies species that may be considered for SCC designation. Please note that the requirement is only for consideration; the handbook direction does not require SCC designation for any species.

[a] Species that *must* be considered. The forest must consider the following species:

- species with a NatureServe rank of G1/N1 or G2/N2,
- species delisted as federally-threatened or federally-endangered in the past five years, or
- delisted species with active monitoring requirements, as described in a post-delisting monitoring plan.

[b] Species that *may* be considered. The forest may consider the following species:

- G3 and S1/2 species,

- Species considered threatened, endangered or conservation priorities by states and tribes,
- Species petitioned for federal listing and species with a positive 90 day finding, and
- Species with documented threats, declining population trends, restricted ranges, or low population numbers in the plan area.

Please keep in mind that, although you can consider virtually any native species, that is known to occur in the planning unit, and with substantial concern about persistence in the planning unit, as species become more common or less threatened, it will be increasingly difficult to demonstrate a substantial concern for persistence. We believe game and demand species are unlikely to meet the criteria for SCC designation, due to perceived inconsistencies between harvesting a species and a substantial concern for its persistence.

[3] *The SCC Listing Process.* Although SCC are designated by the Regional Forester [RF], we believe the initial list of proposed SCC should be developed at the forest level:

[a] The forest should use all available resources to identify species. The revised RF's Sensitive Species list [RFSS] has been developed using the same general selection criteria as SCC, and should be a good starting point for an initial SCC list. Public involvement is also important in developing, and eventually finalizing, your list.

[b] Designating SCC is a two-step process. First, the forest should identify the species for consideration, using the *Criteria for SCC Consideration*, described above [Section 2]. Second, the forest should designate their SCC, based on 'substantial concern for persistence in the planning area,' also described above [Section 1].

[c] Forests should use the deliberative spreadsheet ["Sample Spreadsheet for SCC.June-2014.xlsx"] to document the designation process, and record their species [a sample is attached]. Please complete Columns A through M [the columns with the black headers] using the legend at the bottom of the spreadsheet. Please delete all remaining cells – Columns N through S – as well as the legend at the bottom of your list.

Please note that some species may undergo consideration for SCC, but will not be recommended for designation. For these species, we encourage the forest to complete Columns A through M on the spreadsheet – leading to a recommendation not to list – to document the deliberative process.

[d] Once the spreadsheet has been completed, send a formal letter to the RF through the Correspondence Database, requesting consideration of the list. Please attach the spreadsheet.

[e] The Regional Office [RO] will complete columns N and O, and return the spreadsheet to the project leader on an informal basis.

[f] To respond to the RO recommendations [Column O], complete Column P and, if necessary, Column Q. Return the spreadsheet to the RO on an informal basis.

[g] The RF will determine the SCC [Column R; Column S provides additional information on the final determination], and formally send the list to the forest through the Correspondence Database.