

Region 2 Other Emphasis Species List

Triploid Colorado Checkered Whiptail / *Aspidoscelis neotesselatus* (syn *Cnemidophorus neotesselatus*)

Recommendation Rationale: **Not R2 SS, But Should Be Considered For Other Emphasis Species Lists**

This species is a Colorado endemic, found only in some foothills areas of the upper Arkansas River Drainage and the Purgatoire River drainage. It also is a very unique species, as it is parthenogenetic and thought to have originated relatively recently from hybridization between an individual of *C. tigris* and a *C. gularis*, yielding a reproducing population and new species. The hybrids had one set of chromosomes from each parent. A member of that population is then thought to have hybridized with a six-lined racerunner (*C. sexlineatus*), which led to the current population, having three complete sets of chromosomes. Several subpopulations have been eliminated or substantially reduced due to urbanization in the Pueblo area and land use conversion. Nonetheless, Hammerson (1999) considers the species to be somewhat adaptable and tolerant. It remains relatively common in foothill pinyon-juniper/grassland communities of western Pueblo and Fremont counties, and on or near portions of the Comanche NG in the Purgatoire River drainage. Because the species remains locally common, habitat in portions of its range remain reasonably secure, and the species exhibits some adaptability, it does not appear to merit sensitive species status at this time. However, since the species is a localized endemic, has very restricted distribution, and is very unique biologically, we believe the status of the species should be monitored and that the continued welfare of the species on NFS administered lands should be ensured. Therefore, we recommend that the PSICC consider this species as one of local management emphasis where it occurs on the San Isabel National Forest and the Comanche National Grassland. Found in very limited areas. Note: Also referred to biodiversity documentation at Natureserve.com; distribution data from the Colorado Herpetological Society; Hammerson 1999.

Revised on January 29, 2003 by Gary Patton

UPDATE (Peter McDonald, April 2015): The IUCN Red List identifies the species as "Near Threatened," due to a limited extent of occurrence (entirely SE Colorado) and decline in extent and quality of habitat that if continued might cause the distribution to become severely fragmented (which it is probably not at present). The species almost qualifies as threatened under the IUCN criteria, but is maintained at its current classification due to good reproductive potential, tolerance of moderate levels of habitat alteration, and potential to persist in relatively small patches of suitable habitat. The Natureserve rankings are G2/S2 Imperiled as of the latest review in 2007, noting that it is "known from about two dozen localities in southeastern Colorado; has declined in some areas as a result of urbanization or agricultural development; populations in natural areas appear to be stable; however, better information is needed on current status." Natureserve identifies it as being under medium threat and moderately vulnerable. Colorado identifies the species as a Tier I highest priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need in their 2015 draft update of the state wildlife action plan. On July 8, 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received a petition to list the whiptail under the Endangered Species Act and a

decision on that petition is expected shortly. Overall, there is evidence that habitat quality and some population declines may have occurred since the original 2001 evaluation of this species for sensitive status. It's unclear how much of any population and habitat changes in the interim have occurred on the Comanche NG compared to other locations. This unusual species has a highly restricted range and represents a noteworthy member of the biological diversity of SE Colorado and the Comanche National Grassland. Considering some evidence of declines in population and habitat quality affecting the species in more recent years, viability may not be of concern currently but could be in the future without more focused attention on it and its status and welfare over time. The species appears to warrant sensitive species status in Region 2 to both afford it special management consideration on the grasslands and emphasize the need for better habitat and population status information.

IUCN Red List (accessed 4/28/15): <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22705156/0>

Natureserve profile (accessed 4/28/15):

<http://explorer.natureserve.org/servlet/NatureServe?searchName=Vireo+bellii>