

Species of Conservation Concern

Blue Mountain forests plan revision

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Species of Conservation Concern?

A species of conservation concern (SCC) is a plant or animal for which we have concerns about its ability to remain on a landscape for a long time.

SCC are species other than a federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate species, that are known to occur in the plan area, and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area. (36 CFR 219.9(c)). There must be sufficient scientific information available to conclude that substantial concern exists.

The 2012 Planning Rule replaced the Regional Foresters sensitive lists with SCC. The Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12.52) describes specific criteria to identify species of conservation concern.

We are continually refining the SCC lists based on best available science, so these lists may change before we release a draft environmental impact statement and draft forest plans. These lists are not final until a Record of Decision for each forest is signed.

During April 2024, we are looking for feedback about species we may have missed. The species on each list have been thoroughly vetted based on standard criteria in the planning rule. Public feedback should include evidence such as documented occurrences, or scientific reasons a species may be of concern on the Blue Mountains forests. Please fill out a [feedback form](#) and email it to our plan [revision inbox](#).

What is the difference between an SCC list and the Regional Forester's list of sensitive species?

While the goal of both lists is to prevent species from being federally listed as threatened or endangered, the SCC list has more comprehensive and defined criteria for inclusion than the Regional Forester's list of sensitive species, making it less likely that a species will be overlooked.

Another difference between the lists is our management approach to using the lists. Under the Regional Forester's sensitive species list (1982 Rule) we manage forest resources to maintain species viability, which was often too difficult to measure at the forest level to know if we were being successful. Under the SCC list (2012 Rule) we manage forest resources to provide the type of habitat and other conditions that the species need to persist on the forest.

Are the Regional Forester's sensitive species included on the SCC list? If not, why?

The SCC lists includes most of the Regional Forester's sensitive species but not all of them. We didn't include all the species for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of documented occurrences, a lack of scientific information to support a substantial concern for the species, or because the latest scientific information indicates that the species is not at risk.

What is the difference between an “SCC” and a Threatened or Endangered species?

An SCC is not a federally threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. Threatened and endangered species are federally designated under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This Act was created to protect critically imperiled species from extinction.

An SCC is a Forest Service-specific term that comes from the 2012 Planning Rule and Forest Service Handbook. The regulations help us determine if there is a concern about a particular species' ability to persist within the forest. We create an SCC list using the best available science in a proactive step intended to prevent species from becoming federally listed.

How do SCC lists influence forest plan revisions?

Once we have a preliminary SCC list, we determine the habitat needs of each species. If there is a concern, we design elements of the forest plan to provide the habitat conditions that will enable the species to persist on the forest. The goal is to guide management that sustains habitat to support or restore secure SCC populations to the extent we are capable of doing so. Forest plans help us maintain a forest that provides SCC with the habitat they need to survive.

For instance, each forest plan will have certain components, including standards or guidelines, to sustain or restore ecosystem diversity and habitats. We consider these elements “coarse” filter plan components. If the coarse filter plan components do not provide the habitat conditions each SCC population requires to persist on the forest, then we include additional species-specific plan components to provide habitat conditions necessary for the species. These second components are “fine” filters.

What does “substantial concern” mean?

Substantial concern means there is credible evidence that there is a concern about a particular species’ ability to persist within the forest. This evidence can include one or more of the following:

- The species has been identified as imperiled as a result of status reviews described in the scientific literature and listed in widely accepted databases such as NatureServe, a non- profit organization that provides proprietary wildlife conservation-related data, tools, and services.
- Significant threats, such as climate change or competition from exotic species, threaten SCC populations or their habitat.
- Field surveys have documented declining SCC populations or habitat in the forest plan area.
- The species is known to have low population numbers or restricted habitat within the forest plan area.

What are Focal Species?

Focal species are defined as a “small subset of species whose status permits inference to the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs and provides meaningful information regarding the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area.” The responsible official must identify at least one focal species (36 CFR 219.12).

Focal species will replace Management Indicator Species (MIS) from the 1982 planning rule. The intent is to monitor whether the forest plan is providing for species as intended.

MIS were required by the 1982 Planning Rule, as an interpretation of National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements to “maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area.” MIS populations were intended to be indicative of broader ecological conditions across a forest and to be representative of other species’ status. Population changes for an MIS are therefore interpreted as a potential signal of change in ecosystem health.

Criticisms of the MIS approach to monitoring ecosystem health include: it ignores inherent differences between species; similar species may compete for resources; animal behavior may change seasonally, spatially, or in response to ecosystem change; populations may be limited by factors other than habitat. In 1999, the Committee of Scientists recommended that the NFMA regulation be rewritten to focus on focal species rather than MIS.

Forests with plans developed under the 1982 Planning Rule currently address MIS and Regional Forester Sensitive Species (RFSS) and will continue to do so until the plans are revised. Once SCC and focal species are identified in a Record of Decision, the forests will no longer utilize the MIS or RFSS lists.