



Species of Conservation Concern

Overview

A species of conservation concern is a plant or animal that has been identified for planning attention due to scientific information indicating substantial concern about its ability to persist on the national forest over time. The 2012 Planning Rule generally requires that each plan provide for conditions that would maintain a viable population (a population that is capable of persisting on the forest over time) in the plan area for each species of conservation concern. The Planning Rule makes an exception from the viability requirement when it is not possible, due to Forest Service authority or inherent capability of the land to maintain or restore the ecological conditions necessary to maintain a viable population of a species of conservation concern within the plan area. In such instances, the 2012 Planning Rule requires the Forest Service to provide ecological conditions in the plan area that would contribute to the species' viability within its range.

Why It Matters

National forests are home to more than 3,500 rare and sensitive species. Conserving nonlisted, but at-risk, species is a good strategy to prevent endangered species listings. In addition, these species are important for diversity and ecosystem integrity.

If a species is designated as a species of conservation concern, the forest plan will include plan components to sustain the species and its habitat, and monitoring questions and indicators for key habitat conditions required by the species to evaluate effectiveness of the conservation strategy. Depending on the species' conservation needs, habitat may need to be protected or actively managed to ensure the conservation of the species. For example, areas known to support sensitive wildlife, like bat caves, may be seasonally closed to recreational use or management activities to avoid disturbing sensitive nest or den sites. In other cases, plan components developed for broader ecological sustainability will meet the needs of a species of conservation concern.



Process

The Forest Service will work with the general public, State fish and wildlife agencies, local governments, federally recognized tribes, the scientific community, and other stakeholders to gather information to develop a list of potential species of conservation concern based on criteria identified in the rule and directives. The potential list of species of conservation concern is shared with all stakeholders for input during public outreach and engagement.

Species of conservation concern will be determined by the regional forester and become the subject of planning efforts. Key habitat and other needs identified as being necessary to sustain the species in the planning area are used to develop forest plan components, such as desired conditions or standards. As discussed earlier, the conservation needs of the species of conservation concern can be provided through either ecosystem-scale plan components, or by plan components tailored specifically for an individual species, if necessary.

The regional Forest Service office will maintain the list of species of conservation concern for each unit. If new scientific information indicates the potential need to add or drop a species of conservation concern from the list, the Forest Service will evaluate the information to determine if there is a need for a change. If the regional forester decides to add a species to the list for one or more national forests, the forest supervisor(s) will then determine if their current plan meets the conservation requirements of the new species of conservation concern. If the forest plan meets the requirements, no change will be needed. If the plan does not meet the new requirements, it will need to be amended. The public would have an opportunity to comment on the proposed forest plan amendment.



Monitoring related to species of conservation concern will focus on the ecological conditions necessary to provide for or contribute to a viable population, and it may occur at both the national forest level and at a broad-scale monitoring program level, which may occur across several national forests. Species of conservation concern-related monitoring may be done in coordination with Forest Service research, the public, and other partners. Monitoring information may indicate that there is a need to amend the forest plan to more effectively meet the conservation needs of a species. The public would have an opportunity to comment on the monitoring results and on any proposed plan amendments.

Possible Key Topics

- Best available scientific information about species' occurrence and their ability to persist in the planning area
- Habitat management and other approaches necessary to sustain the species
- Conditions necessary to sustain species of conservation concern
- Plan components to maintain or improve conditions for species of conservation concern
- Conservation needs of species of conservation concern integrated with other programs and uses on the forest
- Role of tribes when identifying species of conservation concern

For More Information

Forest Service Web site on threatened, endangered and other at-risk species: <http://www.fs.fed.us/biology/tes/>

NatureServe Conservation Status Ranks: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/?ref=topbar>

State Wildlife Action Plans: <http://www.teaming.com/state-wildlife-action-plans-swaps>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site on endangered species: <http://www.fws.gov/endangered>