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Contacts:

Denise Rowell, denise_rowell@fws.gov, (251) 441-6630

Tom MacKenzie, tom_mackenzie@fws.gov, (404) 679-7291

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Initiates Status Review of the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced a 90-day finding on a petition to list the eastern diamondback rattlesnake as threatened and designate critical habitat for the species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

This finding stems from a petition submitted last summer by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Coastal Plains Institute Inc., Protecting all Living Species, and One More Generation. The decision, known as a 90-day finding finds that the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing the eastern diamondback rattlesnake may be warranted. The Service will undertake a more comprehensive review of the snake's status throughout the species' range to determine whether listing is warranted under the ESA.

Eastern diamondbacks can grow to a length of about eight feet and are the largest rattlesnakes in the world. The eastern diamondback historically ranged along the coastal lowlands of the southeastern United States from North Carolina to eastern Louisiana, including all of Florida and its Keys. Although once abundant in longleaf pine ecosystems across the southeastern United States, its population size and range has declined. Nearly all of the old growth longleaf pine savannas are gone, and the eastern diamondback survives wherever its native habitats still exist or where open-canopy forests and grasslands are similar to longleaf pine savannas.

The Service is asking for information from state and federal natural resource agencies and all interested parties regarding the eastern diamondback rattlesnake and its habitat. Based on the status review, the Service will make one of three possible determinations:

- Listing is not warranted, in which case no further action will be taken.
- Listing as threatened or endangered is warranted. In this case, the Service will publish a proposal to list, solicit independent scientific peer review of the proposal, seek input from the public, and consider the input before a final decision about listing the species is made. In general, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed for listing and the final decision.
- Listing is warranted but precluded by other, higher priority activities. This means the species is added to the federal list of candidate species, and the proposal to list is deferred while the Service works on listing proposals for other species that are at greater risk. A warranted but precluded finding requires subsequent annual reviews of the finding until such time as either a listing proposal is published, or a not warranted finding is made based on new information.

Please note that submissions merely stating support for, or opposition to, the action under consideration without providing supporting information, although noted, will not be considered in making a

determination. The ESA says that determinations as to whether any species is threatened or endangered must be made “solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available.”

Written comments regarding the proposal may be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. [FWS–R4–ES–2012–0006].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. [FWS–R4–ES–2012–0006]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before July 9, 2012. The Service will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process. The Service is not able to accept email or fax comments.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, watch the YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from the Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.

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