



News Release

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Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan Amended

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has amended its recovery plan for the Sonoran pronghorn, an endangered mammal found only in the most southern reaches of Arizona, to include new guidance. The changes affect the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan and are a court-ordered response to a lawsuit brought by the Defenders of Wildlife in Federal Court against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and five other government agencies.

On February 12, 2001 the Court ruled that the 1998 Recovery Plan fails to establish criteria for delisting Sonoran pronghorn and does not provide estimates of the time necessary to carry out recovery actions necessary to achieve the Plan's goal. The Court remanded these two portions of the 1998 Recovery Plan back to the Service for reconsideration. In response to the Court Order, the new changes, a final Supplement and Amendment, applies specific recovery efforts to appropriate listing/delisting factors, and provides estimates of time necessary to carry out these efforts. The Service believes these recovery efforts will in the short-term lead to downlisting the Sonoran pronghorn from endangered to threatened, and in the long-term, will contribute to the delisting of the species.

A recovery plan outlines specific tasks needed to recover a species to the point where protection under the Act is no longer necessary. Recovery Plans provide a blueprint for Federal, Tribal, State, and private cooperation in the conservation of threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems. The Plans establish goals and objectives to recover a species, describe site-specific management actions to achieve these goals, and estimate the time and costs associated with recovery efforts. Recovery plans are not regulatory documents and do not require non-Federal entities to undertake recovery actions.

Additional information on Sonoran pronghorn biology has been collected since the 1998 Recovery Plan was completed. In order to fully address the Court-ordered remands, the objectives of the Recovery Plan Supplement and Amendment are to: 1) ensure that the best and most current information available is used; 2) address the five listing/delisting factors required by the Endangered Species Act; 3) reassess recovery criteria presented in the 1998 Recovery Plan in relation to these five factors; and 4) provide estimates of time to carry out various recovery actions listed in the Recovery Plan.

The pronghorn is a species unique to western North America with a range that extends from southern

Canada to northern Mexico. The fastest land mammal in North America, the pronghorn is a small-bodied, long-legged speedster of the open plains and deserts capable of sustained speeds of 40 miles per hour with short bursts up to 50 miles per hour. The Sonoran pronghorn is an endangered subspecies of pronghorn native to the hot, dry Sonoran Desert of southwest Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico. Critically imperilled in both countries, the Sonoran pronghorn was first designated as endangered in the U.S. in 1967 under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, which was later affirmed by the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Although probably never abundant, Sonoran pronghorn distribution and numbers have shrunk precipitously over the last one hundred years due to a combination of factors. Long-range movements of 40 or more miles in response to unpredictable, widely-dispersed, and sporadic rainfall, conversion of habitat to other uses and barriers to movement caused by roads, canals, train tracks, and fences are the primary culprits in the decline of the Sonoran pronghorn. Other compounding and equally important causes include such things as overgrazing, diseases brought in with domestic livestock, and over hunting, particularly during the earlier half of the 20th Century.

Sonoran pronghorn may have once freely ranged over more than 35,000 square miles in the U.S. and Mexico. The currently occupied habitat is now thought to be less than 10% of its former size. The world population of Sonoran pronghorn was estimated at just over 300 animals in December 2002, down from an estimated 445 in December 2000. These animals occur in two distinct subpopulations in Mexico and one in the U.S. with little or no interchange. The December 2000 and 2002 population for the U.S. was 99 and 21 adult animals respectively. Numbers in the U.S. are down markedly from a population high of over 200 recorded in March 1994. A significant factor in the decline of this population is poor fawn survival with minimal or no fawn recruitment in five of the last seven years. Poor fawn survival is directly correlated with timing, duration, and distribution of critically important rainfall during the winter months and summer monsoon and its effects on plant growth. In addition, predator-caused high adult mortality and an aging population have contributed significantly to their decline. The severe decline experienced in 2002 was directly tied to a period of extreme drought that extended from August 2001 to September 2002. During this time period, less than an inch of rain fell in an area that on average receives upwards of 9 inches. Sonoran pronghorn biologists have initiated an aggressive program of water developments, forage enhancements, seasonal area closures, and a semi-captive breeding enclosure to help reverse this decline.

Copies of the final supplement and amendment to the 1998 Final Revised Sonoran Pronghorn Recovery Plan may be obtained from Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge at 1611 North Second Avenue, Ajo, Arizona, by calling the refuge at (520) 387-6483, via fax at 520-387-5359, or from the internet at: <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/>. Search under the electronic library for Sonoran Pronghorn documents.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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