

Candidate Conservation

Program Overview

Candidate Conservation is a proactive component of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Program and is designed to conserve species on the brink of becoming listed as threatened or endangered. By working with private landowners, tribes, State fish and wildlife agencies and other federal agencies, the Candidate Conservation Program partners with others in a voluntary fashion to stave off species extinction while promoting common sense multiple-use land management. The Candidate Conservation Program has two key elements: conducting assessments of declining species and removing or preventing the need to list those species. The Candidate Conservation Program supports the DOI's Resource Protection strategic goal by providing technical assistance on implementing conservation actions, assessing the status of candidates and other declining species, and cooperating in the development of candidate and state conservation agreements.

Candidate Species Assessment

Candidate species are plants and animals for which the Service has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them as endangered or threatened under the ESA, but for which development of a listing regulation is precluded by other higher priority listing activities. The candidate review process is designed to provide a means for identifying species that are in need of the ESA's protection before they become extinct. In addition, identification of critically imperiled species assists the Service and our partners in prioritizing conservation efforts. Each year, the Service reviews the status of species previously identified as candidates to decide if these species should be removed from the candidate list or if their listing priority should change. The listing priority number is based on the magnitude and immediacy of threats to the species, as well as its taxonomic status. The Service also reviews the status of species-at-risk to determine if these species should be elevated to candidate status. Annually, the Service prepares a Candidate Notice of Review for publication in the Federal Register. The Notice provides an updated list of candidate species and includes a request to the public for additional status information for each species. The Service requests information on species that should be included or removed from future updates of the list of candidates. The Service also describes its progress in undertaking listing actions and announces recycled petition findings in the Federal Register.

The Service uses all available information to assess species for consideration as candidates for listing. One chief source of information is the network of State Natural Heritage Programs databases, which tracks species that are already imperiled, and those that are declining or at-risk. This additional information, along with Service data, helps identify species that can benefit from early implementation of conservation actions.

Preventing the Need To List Species: A Collaborative Process

Technical assistance is the key phrase that defines the Candidate Conservation Program. Essentially, professional Service biologists deliver assistance to different customers including other federal agencies, State fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and private landowners in the form of information. Interested partners work with the Service to determine what could be done to conserve a declining species found on their property. Service biologists determine the status of the species in question through population assessment techniques and review of information received from our partners. Once an assessment has been conducted, Service biologists recommend various actions to promote species conservation.

Recommendations are developed and used collaboratively with States, territories, other federal agencies, tribes, and the private sector and private landowners to implement actions that prevent or remove the need to list declining species. The Service believes that implementing the Candidate Conservation Program helps realize savings to implementing the Listing and Recovery Programs.

As of December 31, 2003, 256 plant and animal species are candidates for listing. Additionally, 36 species are currently proposed for listing under the ESA and may also benefit from candidate conservation actions. For some of these proposed species, conservation actions taken now can reduce or eliminate the need to publish a final listing, and for others, conservation actions taken before listing will assist in a speedier recovery and delisting.

Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) are voluntary conservation agreements between the Service and one or more private or public parties. The Service works with its partners to identify threats to candidate species, plan the measures needed to stabilize and conserve them, identify willing landowners, develop agreements, and implement the conservation measures and monitor their effectiveness. For example, the Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office has partnered with Mississippi Parks and Wildlife, the USDA Forest Service, and the Mississippi Army National Guard to protect and restore habitat for the Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish (*Fallicambarus gordonii*) in south-eastern Mississippi. As a result of actions under this agreement, the Service expects to remove this species from the list of candidates during FY 2004.

As of December 31, 2003, the Service and our partners entered into 106 approved CCAs to protect candidate species. Many of these agreements have successfully removed threats, thus avoiding listing. In FY 2003, our goal was to make listing unnecessary for 4 species due to candidate conservation agreements and other conservation actions. We made substantial progress with a number of species, and three species that avoided listing in FY 2003 were: Mount Ashland lupine (*Lupinus aridus ashlandensis*); Henderson's horkelia (*Horkelia hendersonii*); and Sacramento splittail (*Pogonichthys macrolepidotus*).

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) expand upon the success of traditional CCAs by providing to private landowners additional incentives for engaging in voluntary proactive conservation through assurances. One of the primary reasons why the Service developed the CCAA program is because of a concern by non-federal landowners about the potential regulatory implications of having a listed species on private land. The CCAA program is specifically targeted for non-federal landowners and provides them with the assurance that if they implement various conservation activities, they will not be burdened with additional restrictions if the species becomes listed under the ESA.

In FY 2004, the Service is initiating assistance to landowners to develop new CCAAs. For example, the Service has begun working with the Weiser, Idaho, Community Golf Course to develop a CCAA for the southern Idaho ground squirrel. Many CCAA efforts involve multiple partners working over large areas and can take two years or more to complete. For example, the Service is continuing to make progress in developing a CCAA for the lesser prairie chicken. This CCAA will assist in providing technical assistance and financial incentives through which non-federal landowners in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas can implement voluntary conservation measures to restore and/or maintain suitable habitat for lesser prairie chickens on their properties. The CCAA will be consistent with a conservation strategy developed by the five-state Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group.

The Service continues to work cooperatively with States and other partners on efforts to conserve the black-tailed prairie dog. The black-tailed prairie dog conservation team is made up of State wildlife agency representatives from each of the 11 states in the historic range of the black-tailed prairie dog. The goal of this team is to develop and implement state management plans that sufficiently conserve the black-tailed prairie dog so that listing is no longer required, while providing assurances to landowners should the prairie dog be listed. Other partners involved in this conservation effort include private landowners, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe (MT), the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (ND), and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe (SD). The Service effort also includes work directly with landowners. For instance, the New Mexico Ecological Service Field Office is working with the Heritage Ranch on a CCAA for the black-tailed prairie dog.

Reducing threats to species and their habitats before they become critically imperiled ultimately results in future conservation efforts that are less costly, more flexible, and more likely to result in successful conservation over time. Given the widespread support among the states and the Service's partners for the Candidate Conservation Program's proactive nature, we have numerous opportunities to continue with and expand upon the success of ongoing candidate conservation efforts, including those that are not part of a formalized agreement. The Service will continue working with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, individual states, and others on State Conservation Agreements to accomplish conservation actions that may reduce or eliminate the need for listing.

2003 Program Performance Accomplishments

In FY 2003, the major accomplishments in the Candidate Conservation Program include:

Strategic Plan-Based Performance Measures: Resource protection/sustained biological communities on DOI managed and influenced land and waters	FY 2003 Planned	FY 2003 Actual	Change	Reason of Change/Comment
Listing species-at-risk is made unnecessary due to conservation agreements	4	3	-1	The Mount Ashland lupine and Henderson's horkelia were removed from the candidate list due to conservation efforts undertaken by the Forest Service in accordance with a candidate conservation agreement. Listing the Sacramento splittail was not necessary due to conservation actions resulting from the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, multipurpose programs under the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, and several restoration activities by a variety of partners. We made progress on a candidate conservation agreement addressing the Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish in Mississippi, and expect to be able to remove the species from candidate status in FY 2004 based on the completed CCA.

- Assessed 304 species including: those that are identified as declining species to determine if they should be added to the candidate list; all those currently on our candidate list to determine if they should be removed from the candidate list or have their listing priority number changed.
- Prevented or removed threats to 3 species were such that listing was not warranted.
- Signed 15 CCAs, including the conservation agreement for 72 miles around the perimeter of Lake Tahoe with the Tahoe Lakefront Owners Association, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, California Tahoe Conservancy, League to Save Lake Tahoe, several State agencies in California and Nevada, and the USDA Forest Service to protect the Tahoe yellow cress.
- Initiated assistance on three CCAAs including the CCA for Southern Idaho ground squirrel.

2004 Planned Program Performance

For FY 2004, the Service requested and was appropriated \$8,670,000 for the Candidate Conservation Program to accomplish the following projections:

	FY 2003 Actual	FY 2004 Planned	Change	Explanation of Change
Listing species-at-risk is made unnecessary due to conservation agreements	3	4	+1	With further information on the development of conservation agreements for FY 04, the Service now anticipates that the listing of the following four species will be unnecessary: 1) the California golden trout; 2) the relict leopard frog; 3) the slickspot peppergrass; and 4) the Camp Shelby burrowing crayfish.

- The Service plans to complete 305 assessments for current and potential candidates such as the crystal darter, a small fish species. The Service is continuing to work with West Virginia University to determine the distribution and habitats used by the Elk River population, which recent genetics work indicates may be a distinct species with a very small population.
- With its partners, the Service proposes to focus on stabilizing 18 species which might need protection of the ESA such as the Vasey’s adelia and Rynyon’s huaco, two plant species that are the subject of coordinated conservation efforts by the Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners.
- The Service also plans to assist in the development of 30 CCAs, of which 5 are anticipated to be approved in FY 2004, including a CCA for the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly that the Service is developing with the U.S. Forest Service, Village of Cloudcroft, Otero County, and the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service.
- The Service is currently providing assistance for 27 CCAAs including CCAAs for the eastern massasauga, a rattlesnake, in Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio, a CCA involving private land in Hawaii to protect 7 species of plants and 5 species of endemic forest birds, and a CCA for multiple species in Oregon, including the Oregon spotted frog and coastal cutthroat trout. Five CCAAs are anticipated to be approved in FY 2004.

Justification of 2005 Program Changes

Subactivity		2005 Budget Request	Program Changes (+/-)
Candidate Conservation	\$(000)	8,610	-1,244
	FTE	77	0

The FY 2005 budget request for Candidate Conservation is \$8,610,000 and 77 FTE, a net programmatic decrease of \$1,244,000 and 0 FTE from the 2004 enacted level.

In 2005, working with private landowners and partners, the Service projects preventing the listing of 4 species due to conservation efforts.

Idaho Sage Grouse (-\$296,000)

In FY 2004, Congress provided \$296,000 to the Idaho Office of Species Conservation. The funds were used to support development and implementation of the state’s “Idaho Sage Grouse Management Plan,” which the Office of Species Conservation has generated with non-federal landowners, State of Idaho agencies, and federal agencies. The Service is not requesting additional or continued Candidate Conservation funding for this effort in FY 2005 since the State of Idaho and the Office of Species Conservation are eligible to apply for grant funding for western sage-grouse conservation actions or Plan implementation through the Service’s State Wildlife Grants program

Alaska Sea Otter and Walrus Research (-\$889,000)

In FY 2004, Congress provided \$889,000 for sea otter and walrus research in Alaska. The funding went to the Alaska SeaLife Center to 1) evaluate sea otter population and ecological characteristics in the Kodiak area to clarify potential causes of the decline and identify current mortality factors or population limiting factors; 2) evaluate population and ecology of otters in areas adjacent to the decline (specifically the Commander Islands, Russia) where the populations are stable; and 3) research and develop new radio telemetry equipment and techniques. Of this amount \$150,000 is for monitoring walrus population size, distribution and other parameters in the Bering Sea. This funding is not being requested due to higher Service priorities.

Idaho Dept. of Agriculture Slickspot Peppergrass (-\$59,000)

In 2004, the Idaho Department of Agriculture (IDA) will build upon a study initiated in 2002 to examine the potential effects of livestock grazing on slickspot peppergrass. IDA and the University of Idaho planned on baseline data collection during the summer of 2003. This study should be completed by FY 2005 and these funds should no longer be necessary.