Press Release

Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Endangered Species Act Protection for Monarch Butterfly; Urges Increased Public Engagement to Help Save the Species

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing protection for one of the nation's most beloved species - the monarch butterfly - and is encouraging the public to be part of its recovery. The Service is seeking public input on a proposal to list the species as threatened with species-specific protections and flexibilities to encourage conservation under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Public comments will be accepted on the proposal until March 12, 2025. The Service will then evaluate the comments and any additional information on the species and determine whether to list the monarch butterfly.

"The iconic monarch butterfly is cherished across North America, captivating children and adults throughout its fascinating lifecycle. Despite its fragility, it is remarkably resilient, like many things in nature when we just give them a chance," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams. "Science shows that the monarch needs that chance, and this proposed listing invites and builds on unprecedented public participation in shaping monarch conservation efforts. Providing monarchs with enough milkweed and nectar plants, even in small areas, can help put them on the road to recovery. Working together, we can help make this extraordinary species a legacy for our children and generations to come."

For more than 50 years, the ESA has been an effective catalyst for on-the-ground collaborative conservation, promoting the recovery of wildlife and conserving the habitats upon which they depend. This proposed rule will help build on and enhance monarch conservation efforts while balancing activities in support of economic growth.

With its notable orange and black markings, the monarch butterfly is one of the most recognizable insects in the world. In North America, monarchs are grouped into two long-distance migratory populations. The eastern migratory population is the largest and overwinters in the mountains of central Mexico. The western migratory population primarily overwinters in coastal California. In the 1980s, over 4.5 million western monarchs flocked to overwintering grounds in coastal California. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 380 million eastern monarchs made the long-distance journey to overwintering grounds in Mexico, completing one of the longest insect migrations in the world.

Today, the eastern migratory population is estimated to have declined by approximately 80%. The western migratory population has declined by more than 95% since the 1980s, putting the western populations at greater than 99% chance of extinction by 2080. During this same period, the probability of extinction for eastern monarchs ranges from 56 to 74%, according to the Service's most recent species status assessment.

Threats to monarchs include loss and degradation of breeding, migratory and overwintering habitat; exposure to insecticides; and the effects of climate change . Although many people have already helped conserve the butterfly, additional habitat and protections are needed to ensure the species is conserved for future generations.

To assist with monarch conservation efforts, the Service is also proposing critical habitat for the species at a portion of its overwintering sites in coastal California. Overwintering habitat provides an essential resting place for monarchs during the cold winter months and helps them prepare for breeding in the early spring. In total, the Service is proposing 4,395 acres of critical habitat for the western migratory monarch population across Alameda, Marin, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Ventura counties in California. A critical habitat designation imposes no requirements on state or private land unless the action involves federal funding, permits or approvals.

The Service collaborates closely with Tribes, federal and state agencies, academic institutions and non-government organizations to carry out conservation efforts for the monarch butterfly. Many partners across the monarch's range are involved in surveys, monitoring and habitat improvements. Much of this work takes place on private lands with the support of local landowners.

The proposal to list the monarch butterfly, and designate critical habitat, will publish in the Federal Register on December 12, 2024. A 90-day comment period will open on December 12, 2024, and will close on March 12, 2025. Information about how to submit comments can be found on regulations.gov by searching for docket number FWS-R3-ES-2024-0137. This docket also includes information about how to attend two virtual public information meetings, and associated public hearings, about this listing proposal.

Everyone can play a role in saving the monarch butterfly. Because of the species' general habitat use and wide distribution, all sectors of society have an opportunity to participate in a broad range of conservation efforts throughout the butterfly's range. Learn more about the monarch listing proposal, and how to help conserve monarch butterflies.

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To read the original press release, visit https://www.fws.gov/press-release/2024-12/endangered-species-act-protection-monarch-butterfly