

Power to the Pond Turtle

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is weighing federal protections for the northwestern pond turtle and southwestern pond turtle as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

The northwestern pond turtle occurs in Washington, Oregon, Nevada and throughout much of northern and central California. The southwestern pond turtle occurs in southern California from Monterey County to Los Angeles, Riverside and San Diego counties into northern Baja California, Mexico. The turtles use rivers, lakes, ponds, streams other water sources and terrestrial habitats throughout their lives.

Ongoing threats to both species include worsening drought conditions, habitat loss and fragmentation, and predation by invasive species such as non-native bullfrogs.

Both the southwestern and northwestern pond turtle are at increasing risk of extinction due to population losses, decreased genetic diversity, and a reduced ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions in the next half century, thus warranting listing as threatened under the ESA.

Ongoing conservation efforts continue to support populations of southwestern pond turtles and northwestern pond turtles in the wild. These include development of a range-wide management strategy by federal, state, and private partners to guide efforts to enhance, protect and restore pond turtle habitat; collaboration with military installations to formalize management recommendations on thousands of acres of military land; and development of habitat conservation plans that provide landowners opportunities to assist in conserving the species and their habitats. The state of Washington implements habitat management and predator control measures while raising northwestern pond turtles in captivity for release into the wild to help boost the population.

In 2022, Sierra Club and co-plaintiffs successfully petitioned a federal district court to vacate the sweeping Trump administration rollbacks to the Endangered Species Act regulations, restoring vital default protections from harm to species newly listed or reclassified as threatened. The court also struck down changes that made it harder to list species, introduced avenues for economic considerations to improperly influence listing decisions, and weakened the protections provided by the agency consultation requirement.



“The 2019 rollbacks to the ESA regulations were an unlawful and irrational mess that undermined critical protections for wildlife,” said Karimah Schoenhut, Earthjustice attorney for the Sierra Club. “In the midst of a global extinction crisis, the court's decision to vacate the Trump administration rules will help ensure that imperiled species receive the protections they desperately need.”