Pearl Darter/Endangered Species Act: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposal to Designate Mississippi Critical Habitat

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The United States Fish and Wildlife Service ("Service") issued a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Pearl Darter under the Endangered Species Act ("ESA").

The proposed critical habitat is found in 13 Mississippi counties.

The Pearl Darter is designated as threatened under the ESA. The Center for Biological Diversity had petitioned for its protection in 2004 and Service designated it as threatened in 2017.

The Pearl Darter is described as approximately 2.5 inches long and named by the Southeastern Fishes Council as one of the 12 most endangered fish in the United States.

Critical habitat is defined in Section 3 of the ESA as:

1. the specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species, at the time it is listed in accordance with the Act, on which are found those physical or biological features;
    1. essential to the conservation of the species and
    2. which may require special management considerations or protection; and
2. specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species at the time it is listed, upon a determination that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species.

The 13 Mississippi counties which contain proposed critical habitat for the Pearl Darter include:

- Clarke
- Covington
- Forrest
- George
- Greene
- Lauderdale
- Jackson
- Jones
- Newton
- Perry
- Simpson

- Stone
- Wayne

A copy of the Federal Register pre-publication of the proposal can be downloaded here.