Pearl Darter/Endangered Species Act: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Designates 524 River Miles of Critical Habitat in Mississippi

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The United States Fish and Wildlife Service ("Service") issued a prepublication notice designating critical habitat for the Pearl darter under the Endangered Species Act ("ESA").

The Service is designating approximately 524 river miles in the State of Mississippi as critical habitat.

The Pearl darter has been described as a small, snub-nosed fish with a black spot at the base of its tail fin. It lives on river bottoms and use the spaces between rocks for hiding and breeding.

The fish was listed under the ESA as threatened in 2017.

Once a species is listed under the ESA, the Service is required to evaluate and identify whether any areas meet the definition of critical habitat. Critical habitat is defined as:

- Specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species at the time of listing that contain physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protection; and
- Specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species if the agency determines that the area itself is essential for conservation.

Critical habitat is designated based on the best available scientific data. However, the Service is also required to consider the economic, national security and other relevant impacts of specifying a particular area as critical habitat.

The 524 river miles in Mississippi are found in the following counties:

- Clarke
- Covington
- Forrest
- George
- Green
- Lauderdale
- Jackson
- Jones
- Newton
- Perry

- Simpson,
- Stone
- Wayne

A copy of the Service prepublication notice can be downloaded here.