

Attachment 2
Criteria and Process for
Designating Sensitive Species in Alaska

Introduction

As per BLM 6840 Manual direction (revised in December 2008), the Alaska State Director must designate and manage sensitive species in part to reduce the likelihood and need for new listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The manual therefore logically dictates that the Bureau sensitive list must include species designated as candidate and proposed under the ESA, as well as species that have been de-listed from the ESA in the past five years. The BLM can readily obtain these species from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) without further guidance from the manual or elaboration here.

Identifying at-risk species with no current ESA status is more difficult, and requires eligibility criteria and a selection process to ensure objectivity and thoroughness. While criteria are provided in the manual, a selection process is not, and therefore must be developed locally. This document discloses both components for transparency and repeatability.

Eligibility Criteria (6840 Manual)

Species designated as Bureau sensitive must be native species that occur on BLM lands, and for which BLM has significant management capability to affect their conservation status. In addition, one of the following two criteria must also apply:

- (1) There is information that a species is known or predicted to undergo a downward trend such that viability of the species or a distinct population segment of the species is at risk across all or a significant portion of its range, or
- (2) The species depends on ecological refugia, specialized habitats or unique habitats, and there is evidence that such areas are threatened with alteration such that the continued viability of the species in that area would be at risk.

Selection Process

Specialists in the Alaska State Office developed a process to objectively apply the eligibility criteria for a complete and accurate list. The process incorporated the following six basic steps:

1. Develop a Broad List of Species At-Risk
Review materials from an array of sources, including but not be limited to:
 - a. The 2006 BLM sensitive species list
 - b. Alaska Native Plant Society rankings and list
 - c. Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, Appendix 7
 - d. ADFG Species of Concern list
 - e. Boreal Partners in Flight list of priority species for conservation
 - f. NatureServe
 - g. Alaska Natural Heritage Program
 - h. FWS Birds of Conservation Concern List
 - i. IUCN Red List
 - j. Species experts in Alaska

2. Refine the List

Refine the list using the NatureServe system of global and state rankings, as obtained from the Alaska Natural Heritage Program (ANHP). Species with global ranks of G1 through G3, or state ranks of S1 through S3 may be appropriate for sensitive species status unless compelling reasons exist and are documented (e.g., significant data gaps indicate high uncertainty). Because the rankings may not reflect the most current information, differentiate distinct populations, or account for exceptional habitat features, species ranked as G4, G5, S4, or S5 should be carefully reviewed by field specialists to determine whether they are appropriate for sensitive species designation. All additions resulting from this process must remain within the criteria constraints.

The NatureServe ranking nomenclature of a species is designated by a letter representing the appropriate geographic scale of the assessment (G = Global, S = Subnational or State), followed by a number from 1 to 5 that reflects relative extinction risk. The definitions are:

G1/S1: Critically imperiled – At very high risk of extinction at the geographic scale due to extreme rarity (often 5 or fewer populations), very steep declines, or other factors.

G2/S2: Imperiled – At high risk of extinction or elimination at the geographic scale due to very restricted range, very few populations, steep declines, or other factors.

G3/S3: Vulnerable – At moderate risk of extinction or elimination at the geographic scale due to a restricted range, relatively few populations, recent and widespread declines, or other factors.

G4/S4: Apparently secure – Uncommon but not rare at the geographic scale; some cause for long-term declines or other factors.

G5/S5: Secure – Common at the geographic scale; widespread and abundant.

3. Land Status

Verify that the species occur or have a high likelihood of occurring on lands administered by BLM-Alaska (Field/District/State Office). A variety of informational sources will be used, including ANHP wildlife range maps and GIS data, ANHP rare plants GIS data, BLM records of occurrence, and knowledge from BLM and other agency specialists. Where spatial data are insufficient to determine overlap with BLM lands, inferences can be made based on the combination of general distribution patterns and habitat availability.

4. State Coordination

Solicit review from ADFG, and incorporate comments as appropriate. Comments from ADFG provide additional perspective on species at-risk, and enhance list completeness.

5. Final Field Review

Solicit review by BLM field and state office specialists. A final field review is needed for several reasons. First, the initial species list as identified in Step 1 has likely changed considerably by this point, and a final review is needed to ensure accuracy. Second, new information may have been obtained that warrants consideration. Finally, a quality control check is needed to ensure that all species meet the criteria outlined in Manual 6840.

6. Finalize List and Prepare Instruction Memorandum

Incorporate results of the final field review, and prepare a state-level Instruction Memorandum to transmit the list.