

The likelihood of survival of Concho water snakes in specific reservoirs is likely to be dependent upon a variety of factors such as—(1) reservoir hydrology (inflows to and outflows/diversions from the lake); (2) the time scale chosen (changes to water snake habitats found along the shoreline and the shallow parts of a lake may occur over several decades as opposed to years); limnology (study of freshwater systems such as lakes ponds and rivers and their plant and animal communities as they are affected by their physical, chemical, and biotic environment); and (4) continuity and connectivity with other Concho water snake populations. The persistence of the Concho water snake in Spence Reservoir does not assure us that the snake will persist in Ivie Reservoir. The two reservoirs differ in their hydrology, and we believe more data are needed to understand the fate of the Concho water snake in Ivie Reservoir area.

Finding

In addition to the analysis discussed above, we evaluated the petition in the context of the snake's recovery criteria as set forth in the species' recovery plan (Service 1993). We will consider the Concho water snake for delisting when—(1) Adequate instream flows are assured; (2) viable populations are present in each of the three major reaches * * *; and (3) movement of an adequate number of snakes is assured to counteract the adverse effects of population fragmentation. Importantly, the petition does not address criterion one. In regards to criterion two, while Concho water snake population in each of the three major reaches are stable, there is no reliable data available to indicate that these populations remain viable. Viable populations are self-sustaining and can persist for the long-term (Soulé 1987).

We believe the information provided by the petitioner has added to our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of the Concho water snake. However, the petition lacks adequate information upon which to evaluate the long-term viability of individual populations. Further investigations are needed to understand the various factors important to the snake's long-term viability, including range wide monitoring, and the future distribution of habitat patches, whether occupied and unoccupied, including those at the O.H. Ivie Reservoir.

In summary, the petition fails to provide information indicating that any of the three criteria for delisting (from the recovery plan) are met. Further, the impact of declining instream flows (due

to drought and/or water diversions), long term changes to lake habitats, pollution, and other habitat threats on the riffle-dwelling fish in the Concho and Colorado rivers are not addressed in the petition.

References Cited

- Colorado River Municipal Water District. 1998. Petition to delist the Concho water snake. Submitted to United States Department of the Interior and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. pp. 33 + appendices a-c.
- Scott, N.J., Jr., T.C. Maxwell, O. W. Thornton, Jr., L.A. Fitzgerald, and J.W. Flury. 1989. Distribution, habitat, and future of Harter's water snake, *Nerodia harteri*, in Texas. *Journal of Herpetology* 23(4): 373-389.
- Soulé, M.E. 1987. Introduction. In: Viable Populations for Conservation. M.E. Soulé, editor. Cambridge Univ. Press. New York. 189 pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Concho Water Snake Recovery Plan. Albuquerque, New Mexico vii+66 pp.
- Whiting, M.J. 1993. Population ecology of the Concho water snake, *Nerodia harteri* paucimaculata, in artificial habitats. Unpublished M.S. thesis. Texas A&M University. xvi+137 pp.

Author: The author of this document is Patrick Connor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office (see ADDRESSES section).

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: July 13, 1999.

John G. Rogers,

Acting Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[I.D. 072099F]

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Hearings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public hearings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene a series of 10 public workshops on the possible use of marine reserves as a fishery management tool in Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted until 5 p.m. on September 13, 1999. The public workshops will be held from August 9 through 24, 1999. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for specific dates and times of the public hearings.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301, North, Suite 1000, Tampa, Florida 33619. Copies of the scoping documents that will be used at the workshops (Marine Reserves for Fisheries Management: Questions and Answers; and Marine Reserves Technical Document) can be obtained from the Council office at 813-228-2815; web site: <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steven Atran, Population Dynamics Statistician, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; (813) 228-2815; Fax: 813-225-7015.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: These workshops are to introduce the concept of marine reserves, i.e., zones of restricted or no fishing, to the public, to solicit public comment on whether they are an appropriate tool to use for fishery management in the Gulf of Mexico, and if so, how they should be used. No specific options to create marine reserves will be presented at these workshops, but the Council will consider comments provided by the workshop participants in deciding whether and how to proceed with the development of marine reserves. The Council intends to use an outside facilitator to gain the greatest amount of input from participants and avoid any perceptions of bias.

The workshops will be held from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at the following locations:

1. Monday, August 9, 1999—Four Points Sheraton, 3777 North Expressway, Brownsville, TX; telephone: 956-547-1500;

2. Tuesday, August 10, 1999—Ellis Memorial Library, 700 West Avenue A, Port Aransas, TX; telephone: 512-749-4116;

3. Wednesday, August 11, 1999—Texas A&M University Auditorium, 200 Seawolf Parkway, Galveston, TX; telephone: 409-740-4416;

4. Thursday, August 12, 1999—Four Points Sheraton, 333 Poydras Street, New Orleans, LA; telephone: 504-525-9444;

5. Monday, August 16, 1999—J. L. Scott Marine Education Center & Aquarium, 115 East Beach Boulevard, Biloxi, MS; telephone: 228-374-5550;

6. Tuesday, August 17, 1999—Hilton Beachfront Garden Inn, 23092 Perdido

Beach Boulevard, Orange Beach, AL; telephone:

334-974-1600;

7. Wednesday, August 18, 1999—The Boardwalk Beach and Conference Center, 9600 South Thomas Drive, Panama City Beach, FL; telephone: 850-234-3484;

8. Thursday, August 19, 1999—Steinhatchee Elementary School, 1st Avenue South, Steinhatchee, FL; telephone:

352-498-3303;

9. Monday, August 23, 1999—Harvey Government Center, 1200 Truman Avenue, Key West, FL; telephone: 305-292-4431; and

10. Tuesday, August 24, 1999—Radisson Bay Harbor Inn, 7700 Courtney Campbell Causeway, Tampa, FL; telephone: 813-281-8900.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities.

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Anne Alford at the Council (see **ADDRESSES**) by August 2, 1999.

Dated: July 27, 1999.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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