

Intermountain Region Species of Conservation Concern June 7, 2017

Species of Conservation Concern (SCC)

Species of conservation concern (SCC) are those other than federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that are known to occur in the plan area and for which the Regional Forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area (36 CFR 219.9(b)(3)).

Although the identification of SCC could occur in association with each Forest's individual plan revision or plan amendment effort, for consistency across the Region, the Regional Forester has opted to establish a Region-wide process, involving a Regional Office Region-wide effort followed by individual Forest-level review and validation and public engagement. The Intermountain Region is using the following process for the initial Regional Forester identification of SCC:

1. The Regional Office (Natural Resources staff specialists) develops the **initial** list of potential SCC for each Forest in the Region and sends the lists to the Forests.
2. Each Forest reviews its respective **initial list of potential SCC**, and the Forest Supervisor (responsible official for plan revisions and plan amendments) provides the Regional Forester recommendations for additions or deletions.
3. The Regional Office considers the Forest recommendations and develops a **draft list of potential SCC** for the Forest.
4. The Regional Forester will provide the Forest Supervisor with the **draft list of potential SCC** for the Forest Supervisor to consider. The Forest Supervisor will make available for public review and comment the **draft list of potential SCC** and the process used for their selection at one of the following times:
 - a. At the time a Forest issues a notice of initiation of the assessment for revision, or
 - b. At the time of a scoping notice or notice of intent for a plan amendment involving changes in direction relating to ecological sustainability or diversity of plant and animal communities.
5. The Forest will review public comments to determine the **Forest Supervisor's list of potential SCC** to Regional Office to consider in establishing the **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** for the Forest.
6. The Regional Forester will inform the Forest Supervisor of the **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** for the Forest, inform the public of the availability of the list for review and comment during the subsequent Forest's identified opportunities for providing substantive formal comment for the planning process, and make the list available on the Regional Office webpage for forest planning.

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- a. If part of the revision process, this should be no later than the notice of availability of the draft revision assessment and shall be no later than the opportunity to provide substantive formal comment on the DEIS.
- b. If part of the plan amendment process, this shall be no later than the notice of availability of the proposed plan amendment and associated draft environmental analysis

Details about the process are provided below in the section "R4 SCC Deliberative Process."

SCC Selection Criteria

The Regional Office and Forests will use the following criteria for identifying SCC, based on FSH 1909.12, Chapter 10, section 12.52:

- 1) SCC must meet the definition.

A species of conservation concern is a species, other than federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that is known to occur in the plan area and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area. (36 CFR 219.9).

Guidance for the definition is as follows:

- a) *A native species.*

An organism that was historically or is present in a particular ecosystem as a result of natural migratory or evolutionary processes and not as a result of an accidental or deliberate introduction into that ecosystem. An organism's presence and evolution (adaptation) in an area are determined by climate, soil, and other biotic and abiotic factors (36 CFR 219.19).

Native species should also be recognized species. Informal taxa, typically identified by English appellations such as "Species 1" or "Population A," should not be included. Nomenclature should follow NatureServe.

- b) *Known to occur in the planning area.*

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A species is known to occur in a plan area if, at the time of plan development, the best available scientific information indicates that a species is established or is becoming established in the plan area. (FSH 1909.12, Ch. 10, Sec. 12.52c)

The following, together or in part, should be considered.

- An SCC should have a reasonably current record or Element Occurrence [EO] on the Forest.
 - Consider 20 years as “reasonably current,” unless best available scientific information indicates a different period should be used.
- Species that are known to occur in the vicinity of the Forest or that has known suitable habitat on the forest but for which current protocol surveys have not been conducted to rule out its presence should not be included as SCC. There will be opportunity to update the SCC list if such evidence of known occurrence on the Forest becomes available.
- Species that are known only from historical records or for which the best available science leads to a conclusion that the species is no longer present should not be included as an SCC. There is no definite standard for when a record or EO becomes historical, but, as records become more historical, they are less likely to meet the “known to occur” criterion.
- Species whose occurrence is accidental, transient, or well outside of the species range should not be considered:

A species with an individual occurrences in a plan area that are merely “accidental” or “transient,” or are well outside the species’ existing range at the time of plan development, is not established or becoming established in the plan area. If the range of a species is changing so that what is becoming its “normal” range includes the plan area, an individual occurrence should not be considered transient or accidental. (FSH 1909.12, Ch. 10, Sec. 12.52c)

- Species that are not known to be currently extant on the forest but for which the states or others are actively pursuing restoration back into historic range and habitats as part of a cooperative conservation strategy or plan should not be included as SCC. Not including a species as an SCC does not preclude management direction for the species during plan development.

c) Substantial concern.

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The best available scientific information about the species indicates substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long term in the plan area. (FSH 1909.12, Ch. 10, Sec. 12.52c)

“Substantial” concern is best demonstrated by some combination of threats either directly to the species or indirectly to its characteristic habitat: declines in the sizes and/or numbers of its populations and/or declines in its habitat.

- The concern must be supported by the best available scientific information.
- Conservation concern is based on conditions of the plan area. Conservation concern is not based on Forest Service actions or actions of others. Regardless of the influence of NFS or other management on the species and habitat, a species must be identified as an SCC if it meets the definition (Washington Office memo, “Clarification of Implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule, Directives, and Species of Conservation Concern,” June 6, 2016).
- Threats such as climate change, non-native species, and genetic swamping can all be valid concerns for certain species.

d) Persistence.

Persistence is defined as “continued existence” (36 CFR 219.19).

- Consider persistence in ecological time, which is the time period associated with ecological processes, ranging from dispersal and competition on the shorter end, to forest succession on the longer end – so longer than the forest plan period (15 years (36 CFR 219.7(a)), but bounded by processes that can be addressed through ecological analyses.
- If solid data do not exist to confidently confirm persistence status for a species from the scale of a plan area, consider other evidence, possibly in combination, from the Forest and other sources, such as the following:
 - Demonstrated concerns about the species at the larger scale based evidenced by existing conservation strategies
 - Trend of population at the larger scale declining
 - Trend of habitat at the larger scale declining

2) Criteria for initial list of species to be considered in the process for identifying SCC.

FSH 1909.19, Chapter 10, Section 12.52d, identifies sources for or lists of species for consideration as SCC for the Forest. The requirement is only for consideration; the

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handbook direction does not require SCC designation for any such species or category of species.

a) Species that *must* be considered.

1. Species with a NatureServe status rank of G/T1 or G/T2,
2. Species that were removed within the past 5 years from the Federal list of threatened or endangered species, and other delisted species that the Fish and Wildlife Service still monitors.

b) Species that *should* be considered.

1. Species with status ranks of G/T 3 or S 1-2 on the NatureServe ranking system, which categorizes the viability status of species.;
2. Species listed as threatened or endangered by the relevant States, federally recognized Tribes, or Alaska Native Corporations;
3. Species identified on other relevant Federal, State, federally recognized Tribes, or Alaska Native Corporations lists as being a high priority for conservation;
4. Species identified as SCCs in adjoining NFS plan areas (including plan areas across regional boundaries); and
5. Species where valid available information indicates the species are of local conservation concern due to:
 - a. Significant threats to populations or habitat from stressors on and off the plan area
 - b. Declining trends in populations or habitat
 - c. Restricted ranges (for example, narrow endemics, disjunct populations, or species at the edge of their range).
6. Regional Forester Sensitive Species

R4 SCC Deliberative Process

The following is the process being followed or that will be followed for the Regional Forester's identification of SCC for each Forest in the Region.

1. The Regional Office (Natural Resources staff specialists) has developed an **initial list of potential SCC** for each Forest in the Region.

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- a. The Regional Office applied criteria for SCC (see above section in R4 Selection Criteria on definition and species to consider) to species occurrence data from current State wildlife action plans, the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) wildlife database, NatureServe rankings, and consideration of known status and trend information from conservation agreements and other sources to develop the **initial list of potential SCC** for each Forest in the Region.
 - b. The **initial list of potential SCC** identifies those G1/T1, G2/T2, G3/T3, and S1 and S2 species and other species with known conservation concerns and identified as occurring on a Forest.
 - c. Where a Forest occurs in multiple states, each state's species rankings were used as part of the evaluation criteria. The **initial list of potential SCC** for a Forest will likely have errors of omission and inclusion and are not to be considered static, with changes upon Forest review.
 - d. For non-plant species, the **initial list of potential SCC** also identifies those species that the Regional Office would recommend for the list of potential SCC pending Forest review.
 - e. Documentation
 - i. The **initial list of potential SCC** will be included in the planning record for the Forest.
 - ii. Supporting documentation, e.g. conservation agreements, will be included in the planning record for the Forest.
 - iii. The database queries or maps supporting the Regional Office inclusion of species for consideration will be maintained for the planning record.
 - iv. The Forest is responsible for maintaining the planning record.
2. Each Forest will review its **initial list of potential SCC**
- a. The Forest should validate if a species recommended by the Regional Office for inclusion on the **draft list of potential SCC** meets the R4 Selection Criteria, given local knowledge, risk, and concern
 - b. The Forest should identify if species that were considered but not recommended by the Regional Office for inclusion on the **draft list of potential SCC** should be included based on local knowledge, risk, and concern and document rationale.
 - c. The Forest should identify species that were not included on the initial list of potential SCC but should be included based on local knowledge, risk, and concern and document rationale.
 - d. For the review, Forests should consider that as species become more common or less threatened, it is difficult to demonstrate a substantial concern for

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- persistence. As a result, G4/5 and S3/4/5 species are unlikely candidates for SCC designations. Similarly, game and demand species are unlikely to meet the criteria for SCC designation, due to perceived inconsistencies between harvesting a species and a substantial concern for its persistence. If the Forest recommends inclusion of such species on the **draft list of potential SCC** based on local knowledge, risk, and concern, the Forest must provide and document the rationale.
- e. Species with NatureServe G/T1 or G/T2 status ranks are expected to be included unless it can be documented that known threats for these species, such as those threats listed for the species by NatureServe, are not currently present or relevant in the plan area. If the Forest recommends exclusion of such species from the **draft list of potential SCC** based on local knowledge, risk, and concern, the Forest must provide and document the rationale.
 - f. Forests should use the attached R4 SCC template to document the Forest's SCC review for each species on the **initial list of potential SCC**.
 - g. The Forest will return the templates to the Regional TES Program Manager.
 - h. The Forest reviews must be included in the planning record for the Forest and be made available for public review when the Forest provides opportunity for the public to review the **draft list of potential SCC**.
3. The Regional Office, with discussion with Forest biologists as needed, will review the templates and provide a recommended **draft list of potential SCC** to the Regional Forester and Forest Supervisor.
 4. At the time a Forest is ready to issue a notice of initiation of the assessment for plan revision or a public notice (scoping notice or notice of intent) to initiate scoping for a plan amendment affecting plan direction for ecosystem sustainability or diversity of plant and animal communities, the following will occur:
 - a. The Regional Forester will transmit to the Forest initiating the planning process the **Regional Forester's recommended draft list of potential SCC** for the Forest
 - i. Transmittal will be through the corporate correspondence database.
 - b. The Forest should review the list and inform the Regional Office if new information indicates a need to change the **Regional Forester's recommended draft list of potential SCC**
 - i. The Forest should complete a new or updated template for the species in question and submit it to the Regional Office TES Program Manager.
 - ii. The Regional Office will document concurrence or not and make recommendation to the Regional Forester.

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- iii. The Regional Forester will inform the Forest Supervisor if a change to the **recommended draft list of potential SCC** is made or rationale for not make a change.
 - i. This will be done through the corporate correspondence database.
- c. When the Forest Supervisor issues the Forest's public notice to initiate the planning process, the Forest Supervisor will review the Regional Forester's **recommended draft list of potential SCC** to determine the Forest Supervisor's **draft list of potential SCC** that will be available for public review and comment.
- d. The Forest Supervisor will provide the public the opportunity to review and comment on the **draft list of potential SCC**.
 - I. The timeframe for public comment on the list of potential SCC and process document will be the same as for the initial comment period for the assessment or the scoping comment period for amendments.
 - II. Requests for public comment should also include request for documentation that supports the public comment.
 - III. At a minimum, the **Forest Supervisor's draft list of potential SCC** and this process document must be posted on the Forest's website.
 - IV. The Forest's documentation of the review of the initial list of potential SCC must be made available for public review.
- e. The Forest will review the public comments and any associated documentation and make a recommendation to the Regional Office about identifying as SCC any species in question.
 - i. The Forest should fill out the template for the species in question to document the rationale for the recommendation.
- f. The Forest Supervisor will transmit to the Regional Forester the **Forest Supervisor's list of potential SCC**, public comments, and Forest reviews of public comments relating to the draft list of potential SCC, including any updated or new templates
 - i. Transmittal will be through the corporate correspondence database.
- g. The Regional Office will review the **Forest Supervisor's list of potential SCC**, Forest reviews, public comments, and templates; hold discussions with the Forest as needed; and make a recommendation to the Regional Forester for **list of identified SCC**.
- h. The Regional Forester will inform the Forest Supervisor and the public of the **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** for the Forest.
 - i. The Forest will inform the public that the list will be made available on the Regional website for forest planning. At a minimum, this will be a notice

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posted on the Forest's website for the planning activity (revision or amendment).

- ii. The Regional Office will make post the **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** for the Forest on the Regional website for forest planning and inform the public of its availability. The Regional Office will inform the public that the Regional Forester's list of identified SCC for the Forest is subject to the objection process at 36 CFR 219 Subpart B and that the opportunities to provide substantive formal comment on the list will be during the remaining opportunities to provide substantive formal comment identified by the Forest's public participation strategy for forest planning.
- iii. The Regional Forester's public notification of the availability of the **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** should be no later than the Forest's issuance of the notice of availability of the draft assessment for revision or the start of the opportunity to comment on a proposed plan amendment and its associated draft environmental analysis.
 - i. For plan revision, the Regional Forester's public notification shall be no later than the opportunity to provide substantive formal comment on the DEIS.
- i. Documentation
 - i. The **initial list of potential SCC** and transmittal from the Regional Forester to the Forest Supervisor will be included in the Forest's planning record.
 - ii. The templates and transmittals from the Forest Supervisor to the Regional Forester documenting recommended changes to Regional Office recommendations to be included on the **recommended draft list of potential SCC** will be included in the Forest's planning record.
 - iii. The **Forest Supervisor's draft list of potential SCC** that is posted on the Forest website for public review will be included in the Forest's planning record.
 - iv. The templates to address new information from public comment and transmittal of the **Forest Supervisor's list of potential SCC** from the Forest Supervisor to the Regional Forester will be included in the Forest's planning record.
 - v. The **Regional Forester's list of identified SCC** and public notification of its availability will be included in the Forest's planning record.