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Agreement Will Speed Recovery of Imperiled Flatwoods Salamanders Found Only in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina

PANAMA CITY, *Fla.*— In response to a [notice](#) of intent to sue from the Center for Biological Diversity and the Gulf Restoration Network, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today [agreed](#) to develop recovery plans for two species of endangered [flatwoods salamanders](#). Under the agreement the endangered reticulated flatwoods salamander will receive a draft recovery plan by May 2017 and a final plan by November 2018; the threatened frosted flatwoods salamander will receive a draft recovery plan by late 2017 and a final plan by June 2019.

"I'm so glad these two species of beautiful, highly endangered flatwoods salamanders will finally get recovery plans," said Jenny Loda, a biologist and attorney with the Center who's dedicated to protecting rare amphibians and reptiles. "The recovery plans developed under this agreement will make sure that we're doing everything we can to ensure these salamanders don't vanish."

Flatwoods salamanders have been protected under the Endangered Species Act for more than 15 years, but the Fish and Wildlife Service has yet to develop the legally required plans that are needed to save these species from extinction. The two salamanders were historically found throughout the once-extensive longleaf pine forests of the coastal plain in Alabama, Florida, South Carolina and Georgia, but today are limited to a handful of small populations in the latter three states.

"Flatwoods salamanders have continued to decline since their listing more than a decade ago," said Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of the Gulf Restoration Network. "The recovery plans that result from this agreement will provide the necessary roadmaps for their survival."



Reticulated flatwoods salamander photo by Jeromi Hefner, USGS. This photo is [available](#) for media use.

Background

The reticulated flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma bishopi*) and frosted flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*) are black to chocolate-black salamanders with light-gray lines and specks that form a cross-banded pattern across their backs. Both species occupy longleaf pine flatwoods in the lower southeastern coastal plain. The animals spend most of their lives underground, in crayfish burrows, root channels or burrows of their own making; they emerge in the early winter rains to breed in small, isolated seasonal wetlands.

Once prevalent throughout Alabama, Florida and Georgia, the reticulated flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma bishopi*) has not been observed in Alabama in approximately 35 years. In 2009 this species was struggling to hang on in 20 small isolated populations, and the frosted flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*) was found in only 25 tenuous populations in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. Since then many of these populations have declined or even disappeared. More than 80 percent of their habitat has been destroyed, and the remnants of pine flatwood areas are typically fragmented and degraded. These species continue to be threatened by fire suppression, drought, off-road vehicle use and disease.

The Fish and Wildlife Service listed the flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*) as a federally threatened species in 1999. As a result of a taxonomic reclassification of the species, in 2008 the Service recognized the flatwoods salamander as two distinct species. In 2009 the agency finalized its determination of endangered status for the reticulated flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma bishopi*), while retaining a threatened status for the frosted flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*). In response to a lawsuit by the Center, the Service in February 2009 designated 4,453 acres of protected critical habitat for the reticulated flatwoods salamander and 22,970 acres of protected critical habitat for the frosted flatwoods salamander.

[Learn more](#) about the Center's campaign to curb the amphibian and reptile extinction crisis.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.1 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

Gulf Restoration Network ("GRN") is a network of environmental, social justice, and citizens' groups and individuals committed to empowering people to protect and restore the natural resources of the Gulf for future generations.

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