

Recommendations for Recovering the Jaguar as a Native Species of the United States

Provided to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service by Life Net Nature, 6423 South Bascom Trail, Willcox, Arizona. Prepared by Dr. Anthony Povilitis, Director, January 18, 2010.

On January 13, 2010, the US Fish & Wildlife Service announced that it will prepare a recovery plan for the jaguar. We strongly urge that the plan focus on restoring the jaguar as a native species of the U.S.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) declares that species like the jaguar that have gone extinct or face extinction in the United States because of inadequate conservation “are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.” The Act’s purpose is “to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved” and programs for their restoration. We trust that the Service will develop a jaguar recovery program that is fully consistent with ESA’s emphasis on conserving our nation’s endangered species and their ecosystems.

The jaguar has inhabited North America for over 500,000 years. In recent historic times, it occurred in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana. Jaguars were decimated by hunting and predator control, and recent reports of the animal have been limited to southern Arizona and New Mexico. Today a cutting-edge conservation program led by the Service is needed to rebuild jaguar presence and protect its remaining habitat in the U.S.

We recommend that the US Fish & Wildlife Service emphasize the following activities in a program to restore the jaguar in the U.S.:

1. Protect vital habitat linkages. As wide-ranging animals, jaguars need “habitat linkages” or areas of relatively open country that connect primary range, such as mountains, canyons, and other remote terrain. Habitat linkages are threatened by excessive land development, urban sprawl, highway and energy transmission corridors, and other activities that radically change the natural character of the land. Important habitat linkages for the jaguar have already been identified by conservation scientists for southern Arizona. Most are at high risk of degradation and loss. The Service should begin a comprehensive effort with county governments, highway departments, public land managers, private landowners, conservation organizations, and others to ensure that “habitat connectivity” for the jaguar is protected.

2. Conserve existing wild land habitats. The United States has large blocks of wildlife habitat that can meet the ecological requirements of jaguars in terms of adequate prey, water availability, areas for seclusion, security, and breeding, and other resources. In the

Southwest, these areas occur within national forests, BLM public domain lands, national parks, and state lands. Some of these lands are threatened by mining, road and highway construction, energy development, overgrazing, and other factors. The Service should undertake a concerted campaign with land managers, natural resource planners, and the public to protect the integrity of “core habitat areas” for the jaguar.

3. Ensure the “porosity” of the U.S.-Mexico border for jaguar. The construction of fencing and related activities along the international border with Mexico has resulted in a barrier to jaguar movement between the two countries. The Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior should engage the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in a recovery plan effort to limit barrier fencing and avoid construction sites and high intensity activities in areas that may be traversed by jaguars.

4. Pursue joint recovery efforts with Mexico. In the broader geographic region that includes the U.S. Southwest, most surviving jaguars today occur in the neighboring State of Sonora, Mexico, in an area some 130 miles south of the international border. Conservation and expansion of this small population is important to the recovery of the jaguar in the U.S. Strategies should be jointly developed with northern Mexico on how best to conserve contiguous jaguar habitat and protect jaguars from poachers throughout the border region. As part of this, we encourage the Service to propose an international conservation area for the borderlands that would protect the jaguar and other wildlife while enhancing relations and security between the two countries.

5. Develop the option to rebuild jaguar numbers and range through reintroduction. Reintroduction of endangered species in order to rebuild depleted or extinguished populations is a common practice in wildlife conservation today. The Service should develop plans for jaguar reintroduction in the event that significant natural migration of jaguars from Mexico, particularly females, appears unlikely in the foreseeable future.

6. Assemble a qualified, dedicated recovery team for the jaguar. The team should consist of broadly-experienced conservation scientists, jaguar researchers, natural resource managers, and planners from federal, state, and county agencies, academia, and conservation organizations who are committed to the goal of jaguar recovery. A lesson learned from the state-run “Jaguar Conservation Team” over the past decade is that progress cannot be expected when a team includes people who oppose recovery in principle.

7. Expediently develop and implement a jaguar recovery program. It has been 18 years since the Service received a petition from Dr. Povilitis to list the jaguar as an endangered species in the U.S. Finally the Service has agreed to develop a recovery plan and protect critical habitat for the species in accordance with the ESA. During that long delay, the Southwest, particularly Arizona, has changed dramatically in terms of human population, related land development and use, border activities, and impacts on jaguar habitat. We

urge the Service to “make up” for that lost time by moving with extraordinary leadership and urgency in developing and implementing a jaguar recovery program.

Sent to:

*Sam D. Hamilton, Director, US Fish & Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC
20240*

*Gary Frazer, Assistant to the Director for Endangered Species, USFWS,
Gary_Frazer@fws.gov.*

Dr. Benjamin Tuggle, Southwest Regional Director, USFWS, RDTuggle@fws.gov

*Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor, USFWS, Arizona Ecological Services Office,
Steve_Spangle@fws.gov*