

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4312

October 23, 2023

The Honorable Martha Williams
Director
US Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike,
Falls Church, VA 22041

Dear Director Williams,

I write today with serious concerns regarding a recent US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposal to list two species of catfish in the San Antonio region as “endangered.” This proposal is based on dubious assumptions, insufficient data, and – most importantly – could threaten the San Antonio region’s ability to access water during times of drought.

On August 21, 2023, USFWS proposed listing the toothless blindcat and the widemouth blindcat as “endangered” (Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2023-0069). These species inhabit the San Antonio segment of the Edwards Aquifer, which supplies drinking water to over two million Central and South Texans and is critical to Texas agriculture.

Prior to August 21, 2023, these catfish were not even a species of concern according to USFWS. Now, USFWS is proposing listing these species as “endangered” – skipping “threatened” status altogether – and appears to have failed to consider the relevant data or consult with local experts. USFWS makes the assumption that these two species are being driven to extinction entirely due to the pumping of water, but roughly the same data was available to USFWS in 1998 when it determined there wasn’t substantial information available to warrant listing these same species.

USFWS makes significant claims about these species despite the fact that it admits “[n]either blindcat species *has ever been directly observed in its natural subterranean habitat.*” Instead, USFWS elected to *infer* key information on “[l]ongevity and reproduction” of the species based on other fish species and salamanders. Further, USFWS obtained some of its data from approximately 100 specimens – some of which were seen over 100 years ago – discharged from eight wells. Most of these wells no longer exist and the limited data on the wells’ depth and location is old and notoriously unreliable.

The proposed listing would force the closure of the two wells that service a massive underground Aquifer Storage and Recovery system (ASR), which serves as a water source for the region during droughts, such as the one Central and South Texas is currently enduring. By turning off these

wells, the ASR would no longer function as a viable water source for the City of San Antonio. Further, closure of these wells could jeopardize other conservation efforts currently undertaken by the Edwards Aquifer Authority and other entities.

This proposed listing is based on weak data and could jeopardize my constituents' access to water. Therefore, I urge you to withdraw this proposed listing and consult with experts on the Edwards Aquifer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chip Roy', with a stylized, flowing script.

Chip Roy
Member of Congress