

48 Hawaii-only species given endangered listing

March 11 2010, By AUDREY McAVOY , Associated Press Writer



In this undated photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an akikiki or Kauai creeper is seen in Kauai, Hawaii. The federal government added the akikiki and 47 other plants and animals to the endangered species list Wednesday, March 10, 2010. (AP Photo/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dr. Eric VanderWerf.)

(AP) -- Wildlife officials lauded Washington's "holistic approach" to conservation in Hawaii after the Obama administration declared 48 species as endangered and announced plans to set aside more than 40 square miles on Kauai as critical habitat to allow the plants and animals to flourish.

Two Honeycreeper birds, a fly and 45 ferns, trees and shrubs found only

on the island of Kauai were among the species named Wednesday, boosting the number of such classifications by the Obama administration from two to 50.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said the government would also be declaring more than 40 square miles on Kauai as critical habitat, a move that would help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopt a new approach to protecting imperiled species by restoring health to the broad [ecosystems](#) they inhabit.

"This is more of holistic approach," said Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Ken Foote.

Previously, the service tried to protect endangered species by adopting separate plans to revive their respective habitats. This led to disjointed and overlapping efforts, particularly in [Hawaii](#), which has more endangered species than any other state.

Suzanne Case, Hawaii executive director for The Nature Conservancy, commended the ecosystem approach, saying it would enable officials to focus on battling large scale threats like weeds and feral pigs.

The Interior Department announced preliminary plans in October 2008 to list the 48 species and establish critical habitat for them. In the interim, it collected public comment and prepared to make the rule final.

The Center for Biological Diversity called the classification long overdue, noting some of the species have been candidates for listing for more than 20 years. The Tucson, Ariz.-based environmentalist group filed a petition to list the 48 Kauai species in 2004 and then followed with a lawsuit two years later.

WildEarth Guardians, a Santa Fe, N.M.-based group, filed its own

lawsuit in January because the federal government was taking longer than the law required to issue a decision.

Like many of Hawaii's [endangered species](#), birds, insects and plants on Kauai - a mostly rural island northwest of Honolulu - are under threat from invasive species infiltrating their habitats.

Feral pigs burrow holes in the forest while looking for food, creating places for still water where mosquitoes breed and spread diseases that kill native birds. Sheep devour native forest trees that rare birds rely on for food.

Lacking natural predators, populations of these mammals have exploded around the islands. Invasive weeds are also edging out native plants.

One of the newly listed birds is the akikiki or Kauai creeper, a small, dark gray and olive honeycreeper in the Alakai Wilderness Preserve that eats insects and spiders. Only some 1,300 of the birds left, down 80 percent compared to the 1960s. Its listing partner, the green and yellow-feathered Kauai akepa, or akekee, numbers just 3,500, down from 8,000 in 2000.

Almost all - or 98 percent - of the land designated as critical habitat is already categorized as such for other endangered or threatened species. Most of the land is owned by the state.

The Interior Department isn't designating a [critical habitat](#) for the loulu palm because the plant is popular among collectors and officials did not want to reveal the location of its habitat.

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