

Feds propose protections for turtles that nearly went extinct in Washington state

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A small and once-prominent species of turtle, endangered by invasive bullfrogs, human development and climate change, might soon see a boost in efforts to rebuild its populations throughout the West.

Officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are considering whether to list the northwestern and southwestern pond turtles as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act, the agency announced last week. Should the turtles make the list, the [federal government](#) would unlock funding and other resources dedicated to building back their numbers.

The two subspecies can be found from British Columbia all the way south to Mexico. Northwestern pond turtles are already listed as endangered by Washington state and while [restoration efforts](#) are underway, it's slow work and experts have been hoping for federal help for years.

The announcement garnered support from both local and national organizations.

"In the spirit of a thriving Northwest, Woodland Park Zoo is heartened and encouraged that our federal leaders are working with us toward the same goal of ensuring a future for these turtles," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal.

Experts with the zoo, alongside others including the state Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Zoo, raise turtles in captivity before releasing them into a protected wildlife area each year.

"For the northwestern pond turtle, recovery from the brink of extinction is possible thanks to a [collaborative effort](#) between Pacific Northwest stakeholders determined to give these local animals a head start," Grajal said.

The northwestern pond turtles historically live in the Puget Sound lowlands and Columbia River Gorge. Their numbers have been cut in recent generations by invasive bullfrogs, which eat the smaller, juvenile turtles, and ravaged further by warming temperatures and ever-expanding cities. By the early 1990s fewer than 200 of them remained in Washington. Now, perhaps as many as 1,000 live in the wild.

Should Fish and Wildlife list the turtles as "threatened" and also pass a technical decision called a "4(d)" ruling, the service would unlock [federal money](#) for things like wildfire suppression, management of livestock ponds, habitat restoration and the removal of nonnative species.

The federal service, representatives of which could not immediately be reached for comment, is opening its proposal to public comment for 60 days before deciding whether to add the turtles to its list of threatened species.

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