

4 salamander species proposed for endangered list

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By [Benjamin Wermund](#) | Tuesday, August 21, 2012, 12:08 PM

UPDATED, 12:08 p.m.: After a year of consideration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this morning officially proposed adding four Central Texas salamander species to the endangered species list.

The Austin blind salamander, Jollyville plateau salamander, Georgetown salamander and Salado salamander would be added to the endangered species list under the proposal.

"The Edwards Aquifer is an important water source not only for these four salamander species, but also for those living and working in the area," Adam Zerrenner, the service's Austin Field Office Supervisor said in an announcement. "Efforts to improve and conserve the water and springs associated with the Edwards Aquifer will help ensure a healthy future for our community and the plants and animals that depend upon the Edwards Aquifer."

The announcement comes despite efforts by some area congressional representatives to block the proposal.

An endangered listing would designate about 6,000 acres in Travis, Williamson and Bell counties as critical habitat for the four species. Critics have said that marking the species as endangered — and the federal regulations associated with that — would hamper development in those counties.

Next steps include a 60-day public comment period. Hearings are scheduled for Sept. 5 in Round Rock and Sept. 6 in Austin.

Williamson County officials, who have been fighting adding salamander species to the endangered list for about a year, said they were disappointed — but not surprised — that the service moved to list the salamanders.

The county's conservation foundation has spent or committed to spend more than \$650,000 on salamander research, hoping to show the species are not actually endangered.

"We have expended a great deal of effort to build a case that says there is no scientific justification at this time to list them," said Gary Boyd, the county's director of environmental services.

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