



For Immediate Release

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Hellbender Proposed for Endangered Species Protection

Washington, DC – Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a [proposal](#) to list the eastern hellbender as an endangered species throughout its range under the Endangered Species Act. This action was taken after a [lawsuit filed](#) by Center for Biological Diversity on behalf of Waterkeepers Chesapeake, Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper, Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper, and Waterkeeper Alliance.

The Eastern Hellbender, our country's largest salamander species, has seen large-scale declines in habitat and populations in much of its original range, which includes the Mid-Atlantic to the Midwestern states as well as the southeastern corner of the country. Even in areas where it still can be found in pockets, such as the Susquehanna River basin in North Central Pennsylvania, experts suggest 95 percent of its habitat is gone.

“This proposed listing is a great victory, not only for the hellbenders, but for all species that rely on clean, free-flowing streams and rivers. Hellbenders are like the canary in the coal mine. This ancient species is now almost gone from much of Appalachian streams because they are incredibly sensitive to pollutants and the destruction of their habitats,” said Robin Broder, Deputy Director, Waterkeepers Chesapeake.

“We applaud this long-overdue proposal to protect a species that desperately deserves our recognition and protection. There are few creatures as symbolically significant to our work in the Susquehanna River watershed as the eastern hellbender, a misunderstood and underappreciated species that is a critically important litmus test of water quality,” said John Zaktansky of Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper. “It is estimated by local hellbender expert Dr. Peter Petokas that as much as 95% of their habitat in our nearby river system is gone.”

“With an official listing under the Endangered Species Act, conservation efforts can expand to support the life of the eastern hellbender,” said Ted Evgeniadis of Lower Susquehanna

Riverkeeper Association. “Unchecked development and irresponsible use of our water resources has allowed their populations to decline but today’s proposal gives this critical species a future.”

Hellbenders face tremendous threats from activities that degrade water quality. Throughout their 15-state range only 12% of populations are stable and successfully reproducing. The range of eastern hellbenders includes Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Much of their range is threatened by mining, drilling and development. Extreme storms due to climate change are devastating their populations. Recently, Hurricane Helene destroyed the healthiest part of their range in North Carolina, and forest damage and contamination from the storm will continue to pollute these areas.

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Waterkeepers Chesapeake fights for clean water and a healthy environment by supporting its 17 Waterkeepers throughout the Chesapeake and coastal regions as they protect their communities, rivers, and streams from pollution. <https://waterkeeperschesapeake.org/>

The Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association is a nonprofit organization committed to protecting and promoting the water-based resources within an 11,000-square-mile, 25-county watershed that feeds into the North and West branches of the Susquehanna River in central, northcentral and northeast Pennsylvania. <https://www.middlesusquehannariverkeeper.org/>

The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association is a licensed Waterkeeper® organization dedicated to improving the ecological health of the Lower Susquehanna River Watershed and the Chesapeake Bay. The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper patrols the river for illegal pollution, and when necessary, enforces environmental laws to protect the river and communities that depend on it. <https://www.lowersusquehannariverkeeper.org/>