

or not the robust blind salamander is specifically distinct from the Texas blind salamander. Furthermore, since no salamanders resembling the description of the robust blind salamander have been observed since 1951, the current existence and distribution of this form, if valid, is unknown.

Both the toothless blindcat and the widemouth blindcat are recognized as distinct species and occur in the deep portions of the Edwards aquifer (over 300 meters below the surface) in Bexar County, Texas. A status report was prepared for both species in 1979 (Longley and Karnei 1979), which recommended additional sampling of artesian wells in Medina, Uvalde, and Kinney counties to determine the blindcats' ranges. This information is not updated in the petition, and the Service is unaware of any attempts to conduct further sampling efforts. Although the petition states that both blindcats have experienced population declines, no data were provided for the Service to evaluate. The petition also cites dewatering, intrusion from the saline water zone, direct mortality due to pumping from the aquifer, as well as contamination from human activities over the aquifer as threats, but provides no supporting documentation. Information regarding the distribution of the blindcats and documentation and assessment of threats to these species are needed.

As additional data become available, the Service will reassess the need for listing the robust blind salamander, widemouth blindcat, and toothless blindcat. Thus, the Service would appreciate any additional data, information, or comments from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning the status of these species. In particular, the Service needs additional information to determine (1) the taxonomic status of the robust blind salamander, whether or not it still exists, and, if it still exists, the extent of its distribution; (2) the distribution of the toothless and widemouth blindcats; and, (3) the threats to these species.

References Cited

- Longley, G. and H. Karnei. 1979. Status of *Trogloglanis pattersoni* Eigenmann, the toothless blindcat, and status of *Satan euryostomus* Hubbs and Bailey, the widemouth blindcat. Endangered Species Report, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, NM.
- Potter, F.E. and S.S. Sweet. 1981. Generic boundaries in Texas cave salamanders, and a redescription of *Typhlomolge robusta* (Amphibia: Plethodontidae). *Copeia* 1:64-75.
- Russell, W.H. 1976. Distribution of troglobitic salamanders in the San Marcos area, Hays County, Texas. Unpubl. Report 7601, Texas Association for Biological Investigations of Troglobitic *Eurycea*. University of Texas Station, Austin, TX. 35 pp.

Author. The primary author of this document is Lisa O'Donnell, Austin Ecological Services Field Office (see ADDRESSES section).

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: August 21, 1998.

Jamie Rappaport Clark,

Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[I.D. 061998C]

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Petition for Rulemaking for Rotational Opening of Georges Bank Closed Areas for Scallop Fishing; Reopening of Comment Period

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of receipt of petition for rulemaking; reopening of comment period.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that it is reopening the public comment period for the petition for rulemaking requesting that sea scallop harvest be allowed on a rotational basis in areas of Georges Bank that are currently closed to all vessels capable of catching groundfish.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted through October 9, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Comments on the petition should be directed to Dr. Gary C. Matlock, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Copies of the petition for rulemaking are available upon request from the same address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark R. Millikin, 301-713-2341.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As a result of requests received from the Conservation Law Foundation, Rockland, Maine, in a letter dated August 14, 1998, from David E. Frulla, of Brand, Lowell, and Ryan (the Petitioner), in a letter dated August 25, 1998, and from the Environmental Defense Fund in a letter dated August 31, 1998, NMFS is reopening the comment period for the petition for rulemaking, which closed August 31, 1998. The notice of receipt of petition for rulemaking was published in the **Federal Register** on June 30, 1998 (63 FR 35560). The Conservation Law Foundation advised NMFS that it needs more time to investigate issues that were raised at an August 11, 1998, meeting of the New England Fishery Management Council regarding the details of an experimental fishery. The experimental fishery was requested by Brian Rothschild of the Center for Marine Science and Technology of the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth (CMAST), and is mapping sea scallop distribution and abundance, as well as bycatch of other protected species (particularly groundfish) in Closed Area II. The Petitioner requests an extension of the comment period for its petition so that the information obtained from the sampling of the CMAST experimental fishery can be included in the decisional record and analyzed prior to NMFS's decision on its request for rulemaking. The Environmental Defense Fund requested a reopening of the comment period to allow additional time for persons who were either traveling or otherwise unavailable during August to submit comments on the petition. Because of these requests, NMFS is reopening the public comment period for the petition for rulemaking for an additional 30 days effective September 9, 1998, through October 9, 1998.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: September 2, 1998.

Bruce Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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