



FACT SHEET ON SALAMANDERS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is considering changing the status of the Jollyville Plateau Salamander and the Georgetown Salamander under the Endangered Species Act from candidate species for protection to listed as endangered. An endangered species is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Both species live completely in the water and are members of the family *Plethodontidae*, also known as the lungless salamanders. In these salamanders, oxygen exchange occurs entirely through their skin and/or gills.

The Jollyville Plateau Salamander (*Eurycea tonkawae*) is a small, brownish salamander that lives in the springs located in northwest Austin and southern Williamson County. Most of the known locations for this species are within lands preserved under the Austin and Travis County Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan (BCCP), but source water for the springs comes from a partially urbanized area where water quality is potentially threatened. Additional conservation measures are underway to address water quality. These measures might affect activities such as utility construction, road construction and maintenance, and storm water management projects.

The Georgetown Salamander (*Eurycea naufragia*) is a small salamander that is believed to exist only in Williamson County. It lives in springs found in the South, Middle and North Forks of the San Gabriel River and tributary creeks and in wet caves. Williamson County and the Williamson County Conservation Foundation (WCCF) are developing a conservation plan for the salamander in order to protect its habitat. SWCA Environmental Consultants, an Austin-based consulting firm, and Dr. Ben Pierce, a distinguished professor of biology at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, have been hired to assist the county in its efforts. They are in the second year of a five year plan to record and study the species and potential threats to its habitat.

The Problem: Due to the settlement of a federal lawsuit, USFWS is considering changing the status of these salamanders to federally endangered species; however, this should not be a federal issue, this is a local control issue. These species only exist in our local area, not across several states or even a large portion of one state. By making this a federal issue, the federal government could impose restrictions on local entities instead of empowering local governments to take appropriate action. The local governing entities have already been handling the protection of these salamanders for several years and are providing funding for specific studies to assist local entities to make sound, science based decisions about how best to protect the salamanders.

The Solution: Williamson County, WCCF and the BCCP have already provided a reasonable level of protection for the species. Williamson County purchased the Twin Springs Preserve, which is one of the known habitats of the Georgetown Salamander. The County also has protected a significant portion of the drainage area for Cobb Spring which hosts a salamander population. WCCF is in the middle of a five year plan to record and study the species and find ways to protect other springs. This research has resulted in the discovery of two previously unknown salamander populations. Since it started its efforts to protect and study the Georgetown Salamander, USFWS recommended that the Georgetown salamander's listing priority be lowered from a 2 to an 8. The listing would reverse that decision. In addition, the County is already monitoring water quality. One effect urban development has on the aquifer and watersheds of these salamanders is an increase in storm water runoff. The increased flow of storm water can remove the cobble and gravel substrate the salamanders use for cover and to lay their eggs. Runoff also brings contaminants from the roadways and people's yards, including increased sediment and dangerous chemicals found in lawn care products, gasoline, motor oil, and other pollutants.

Conclusion: Because the species is found in a very limit habitat, it is thought to be more susceptible to extinction. However, through the dedication of preserve areas for this species, continually studying the species and monitoring of water quality in its watershed, its small geographic area is being protected already through local efforts.