



Working to Protect Native Species and Their Habitats

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Imperiled Black Hills American Dipper is denied much needed study” U.S Fish and Wildlife Service inexplicably changes its criteria for denying further study

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Laramie— Today, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced today that it will not study the Black Hills population of the American dipper to see if the unique bird should be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Conservation groups originally requested Endangered Species Act protection for the American dipper in March, 2003. Fish and Wildlife denied that petition claiming that loss of the Black Hills population would not be significant to the survival of dipper populations located elsewhere. In August of 2008, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance and three other conservation groups filed a new petition with the FWS to list the Black Hills population of the American dipper as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. In today’s response to the 2008 petition FWS changes it 2003 response and now claims that the Black Hills dipper population in not a distinct population.

State of the art genetics research conducted at the Center for Conservation of Biological Resources at Black Hills State University suggests the Black Hills population of American dippers might be a distinct population. Cynthia Anderson, one of the principal scientist on the study, stated, “Our research indicates that the Black Hills dipper population could be distinct from other dipper populations studied so far. Further study is needed. Why the Fish and Wildlife Service does not recognize this need for more study is puzzling.”

The new genetics science was presented to the FWS in the conservation groups’ petition but appears to have been ignored by FWS.

Duane Short, Wild Species Program Director for Biodiversity Conservation Alliance explained, "This stage of the process is called a 90-Day Finding, which by design, has a very low bar by which Fish and Wildlife is to measure the science provided by petitioners. This bar is low to help assure that no species is at risk of becoming extinct due to unwarranted inaction by Fish and Wildlife."

Josh Pollock, Conservation Director, Center for native ecosystems, expressed concern for Black Hills population stating, "Dippers are very sensitive to stream degradation, water quality, and other habitat disturbances." A University of Wyoming study concluded that variation in water quality impacts whether the dipper will be present in a given stream.

In both their 2003 and 2009 petition responses, the Service's refusal to conduct further study suggests they are taking a position that the Black Hills population of dipper is, essentially, not worth saving.

Nancy Hilding, President of Prairie Hills Audubon Society of Western South Dakota, reflected, "The dipper is a very special bird; it is a joy to watch. It has a unique ability to live, feed, and play in the rapids and cascades of cool mountain streams of the west, and often lives in the most beautiful places. South Dakotans should be proud that the Black Hills National Forest still hosts this unique American dipper population. We need to insure the dipper has the protection and recognition it deserves and that it survives for future generations to enjoy."

Repeated surveys conducted by the South Dakota Department of Game and Fish indicate that the Black Hills population of American dipper is in severe decline.

Short concluded, "If the Black Hills American dipper is to survive action must be taken now to protect this unique bird."

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