

DATES: The finding announced in this document was made on May 30, 2003. Although further listing action will not result from this finding, we request that you submit new information concerning the status of or threats to this subspecies whenever it becomes available.

ADDRESSES: You may send data, information, or questions concerning this finding to the Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102, Lacey, WA 98503. In order to inspect the petition, the administrative finding, supporting information, and comments received, you may make an appointment during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ken Berg, Manager, Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office (see

ADDRESSES) (telephone 360/753-9440, facsimile 360/753-9405).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act) (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), requires that, for any petition to revise the List of Threatened and Endangered Species that contains substantial scientific or commercial information that listing may be warranted, we make a finding within 12 months of the date of the receipt of the petition on whether the petitioned action is (a) not warranted, or (b) warranted, or (c) warranted but precluded by other pending proposals. Such 12-month findings are to be published promptly in the **Federal Register**.

On January 4, 2001, we received a petition dated December 29, 2000, from the Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, Bellingham, Washington, and the Tacoma Audubon Society, University Place, Washington. The petition requested an emergency rule to list the Washington population(s) of the western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus griseus*) as threatened or endangered under the Act or, alternatively, the immediate emergency listing of just the southern Puget Sound population of western gray squirrels, followed by a later consideration of the "full Washington State distinct population segment under the standard processing requirements." On October 29, 2002, we announced an initial petition finding in the **Federal Register** (67 FR 65931) concluding the petition presented substantial information to indicate there may be one or more distinct population segments (DPS) of western gray squirrels in Washington for which listing may be

warranted. We are making this 12-month petition finding in accordance with a court order to complete this finding by June 1, 2003 (*Northwest Ecosystem Alliance v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* (CV No. 02-945 KI (D.OR))).

Taxonomy

The western gray squirrel belongs to the mammalian order Rodentia, the suborder Sciurognathi, and the family Sciuridae. There are three subspecies of western gray squirrel: *Sciurus griseus griseus*, which ranges from central Washington to the western Sierra Nevada Range in central California; *S. g. nigripes*, which ranges from south of San Francisco Bay in the central California Coast Range to San Luis Obispo County; and *S. g. anthonyi*, which ranges from the southern tip of the Coast Range (near San Luis Obispo, California) into south-central California (Hall 1981). *Sciurus griseus griseus* was described from a squirrel seen by Lewis and Clark at The Dalles in Wasco County, Oregon (Bailey 1936; Hall 1981).

The western gray squirrel is the largest native tree squirrel in the Pacific Northwest and is the only member of the genus *Sciurus* native to Washington. Two other members of the genus found in Washington are introduced species: the eastern gray squirrel (*S. carolinensis*) and the fox squirrel (*S. niger*) (Washington Department of Wildlife (WDW) 1993). Other common names applied to this subspecies include the silver-gray squirrel (Bailey 1936; Booth 1947; Maser *et al.* 1981), California gray squirrel (Grinnell and Storer 1924; Couch 1926), Oregon gray squirrel (Bowles 1921), Columbian gray squirrel (Bailey 1936), banner-tail (Scheffer 1923), and gray squirrel (Bowles 1920, Booth 1947).

Description and Natural History

Western gray squirrels are silvery-gray with dark flanks and creamy white underneath. The tail is long, bushy, and edged with white; darker hairs in the tail give it a pepper-gray frost effect. Large ears without tufts also distinguish the western gray squirrel from other tree squirrels. There is a light reddish-brown wash on the backs of the ears, but otherwise the western gray squirrel is entirely gray. To some extent it resembles the eastern gray squirrel, native to the eastern United States but introduced into the range of the western gray squirrel. However, eastern gray squirrels, which are smaller in size, also have smaller tails and rufous (reddish) coloration on the head, back, flanks, and

underparts (WDW 1993; Carraway and Verts 1994; Ryan and Carey 1995a).

Body measurements of western gray squirrels can be variable. Adult weights can range from 18 to 33 ounces (520 to 942 grams). Total lengths (inclusive of body and tail) may range from 20 to 24 inches (in) (500 to 615 millimeters (mm)), with tail lengths ranging on average from 9 to 15 in (240 to 381 mm) and body lengths ranging from 10 to 15 in (265 to 391 mm) (Hall 1981; Carraway and Verts 1994). Based on the results of four studies, body measurements of western gray squirrels in Klickitat County, Washington, were found to be significantly larger than elsewhere in the subspecies' range (Mary Linders, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), pers. comm. 2003d).

Western gray squirrels are arboreal (adapted for living in trees) and, although they forage on the ground, they rarely stray far from trees. They use tree canopies for escape, cover, and nesting. Western gray squirrels can move rapidly and cover long distances among tree canopies when canopy conditions permit. A contiguous tree canopy that allows arboreal travel for at least 198 feet (ft) (60 meters (m)) around the nest is an important feature of western gray squirrel habitat (Ryan and Carey 1995a).

Western gray squirrels avoid open spaces; in the Puget Trough, western gray squirrels will not cross the prairie to use an isolated tree (Ryan and Carey 1995a). Western gray squirrels, when released from traps and pointed toward openings, did not cross the prairie or open areas any larger than about 40 ft (12 m). Movements across relatively open areas to small groups of trees or small habitat patches can be facilitated by scattered saplings and small trees in fence lines or in the open areas. For example, one radio telemetered squirrel was observed in a group of three isolated trees separated from the main stand by scattered individual trees. The distance of movement, which is rapidly completed, across a relatively open area with scattered trees may be about 150 ft (50 m) (M. Linders, pers. comm. 2003a).

Ryan and Carey (1995b) found that western gray squirrels on Fort Lewis Military Reservation (Fort Lewis) in Washington were rarely seen in small (less than 5 ac (2 ha)), isolated pure oak stands or in pure Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) stands away from oaks. Western gray squirrels preferred stands with a mixture of conifers, oaks, and other food-bearing tree species, and were seen most often in stands greater than 5 acres (ac) (2 hectares (ha)) in size and not more than 1,280 ft (390 m) away from water.