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Nearly 2,000 Acres of Critical Habitat Protected for Endangered Miami Tiger Beetle

Florida Beetle Threatened by Development, Sea-Level Rise

ST. PETERSBURG, *Fla.*— Following a legal victory for the Center for Biological Diversity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated 1,869 acres of lifesaving critical habitat for the endangered Miami tiger beetle in Miami-Dade County. The beetle currently survives in only two isolated populations, separated by urban development.

“I’m so glad the Miami tiger beetle finally received these long-awaited and desperately needed habitat protections,” said Ragan Whitlock, a Florida-based attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “But development continues to threaten the beetle’s last remaining populations. Federal wildlife officials need to do everything in their power to protect the places where these tiny, yet ferocious beetle live if they’re going to win their fight against extinction.”

In its federal notice, the Service emphasized that the Miami tiger beetle will need to have additional populations if it is going to recover and emphasized the importance of the beetle’s last remaining habitat in the Richmond Pine Rocklands, noting that it contains biological features the beetle needs to survive.

“We are happy to see that the Service finally designated critical habitat for the Miami tiger beetle, which is crucial to the survival of this highly endangered species,” said Lauren Jonaitis, senior conservation director at Tropical Audubon Society. “But we still have major concerns that the proposed Miami Wilds waterpark and retail development will irrevocably harm the beetle and other endangered species, including the Florida bonneted bat and Bartram’s scrub-hairstreak butterfly, who depend on the area for their survival. So, there is still much more work to be done to ensure the survival of these integral native species.”

“We welcome this long-awaited action by the Service, which begins the federal government’s protection of this incredibly rare life form,” said Dennis Olle, president of the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association.

Although the final rule protects remnant pine rockland habitat, the beetle and its habitat are threatened by imminent development in Miami-Dade County. The proposed Miami Wilds waterpark and retail development plans to bring a 27.5-acre water park, retail area, hotel and dozens of acres of associated parking lot to the area. Development threatens to cause cascading effects on imperiled species, including the Miami tiger beetle, and to surrounding ecosystems.

The Center, Tropical Audubon, Miami Blue and species experts filed a 2014 petition to protect the beetle under the Endangered Species Act after learning that an area known as the Richmond Pine Rocklands in south Miami was under immediate threat of development. This area is where the beetle was rediscovered in 2007, six decades after it was initially discovered. The pine rocklands contain the vast majority and largest single block of remaining habitat for the beetle, as well as several other endangered species.

In response to the petition, the Service listed the beetle as endangered in 2016 but did not concurrently designate critical habitat as required by the Endangered Species Act.

Following legal action by the Center, the Service finally proposed critical habitat for the beetle in 2021, but it took a second lawsuit by the Center, Tropical Audubon and Miami Blue to compel today's final designation.

The Miami tiger beetle is beautifully gem-like with an emerald sheen. It is named for its aggressive, predatory behavior and strong mandibles. Its proposed critical habitat largely overlaps with designated critical habitat for Carter's small-flowered flax, Florida brickell-bush, Bartram's scrub-hairstreak and Florida leafwing.

Species with federally protected critical habitat are more than twice as likely to be moving toward recovery than species without it. Federal agencies that fund or permit projects in critical habitat must consult with the Service to ensure habitat is not adversely modified.



Miami tiger beetle. Credit: Jonathan Mays, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Image is available for media use.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The Miami Blue Chapter serves southeastern Florida, specifically Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. We are a membership based, not-for-profit organization working to increase the public enjoyment and conservation of butterflies. The Chapter is named after one of the rarest butterflies in North America, which used to (and one day will again) call Miami home.

Tropical Audubon Society is a science-and solutions-based nonprofit conservation organization driven by its grassroots community and principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. Tropical Audubon's Legacy is to protect, conserve and restore South Florida ecosystems by working closely with local governments and other stakeholders, and by fostering wise stewardship of native habitats, birds and other indigenous wildlife.