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Critical Habitat Designated for Endangered Florida Bonneted Bat

Over 1.1 Million Acres Designated in 13 Florida Counties

ST. PETERSBURG, *Fla.*— Following a court-ordered [agreement](#), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today [designated](#) more than 1.1 million acres of critical habitat for the endangered Florida bonneted bat. The indigenous bat faces devastating habitat loss from sea-level rise and destructive development.

In the final designation, the Service clarified that essential foraging areas in urban critical habitat units are protected under the rule. The Service also explained that habitat with sufficient darkness is essential to the conservation of the Florida bonneted bat and noted that minimizing the use of artificial light and facilitating controlled burns may benefit Florida bonneted bats.

“I’m happy that Florida’s unique bats finally have protection for some of their most important habitat,” said Ragan Whitlock, a Florida-based attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “The Service correctly recognized that dark, open foraging spaces in urban Miami-Dade County are essential to this species’ survival. I applaud the Service for safeguarding this amazing bat’s remaining habitat that persists amid a sea of destructive development.”

This is a much welcomed, albeit delayed, action by the Service,” said Dennis Olle, president of the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. “This critical habitat designation for one of North America’s rarest bats, provides an umbrella of protection for all species living thereunder.”

Encroaching development and pesticide use nearly drove Florida bonneted bats extinct before [litigation](#) filed by the Center compelled the Service to protect the bat under the Endangered Species Act in 2013. Conservation groups sued in [2018](#) and again in [2022](#) to secure habitat safeguards for the species.

Today’s critical habitat designation is the result of the 2022 lawsuit by the Center, Tropical Audubon Society and the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association.

Although the proposal acknowledged the bats and their habitat are threatened by climate change and sea level rise, the Service did not extend badly needed protections for unoccupied critical habitat.

“We are glad to see that the Service has finally established habitat protections for this species, including more than 4,000 acres in the globally critically imperiled Miami pine rocklands,” said Lauren Jonaitis, senior conservation director at Tropical Audubon Society. “However, we still have major concerns that the Service failed to include unoccupied critical habitat to bolster against habitat loss from impending sea-level rise.”

Unfettered development and irresponsible development continue to threaten remaining Florida bonneted bat habitat. A proposed theme park, retail and parking development recently threatened their critical habitat. This dark, open space next to Zoo Miami is recognized as the most important foraging ground for the largest known population of Florida bonneted bats. Plans for the Miami Wilds theme park were halted in December after the Center, Bat Conservation International, Tropical Audubon Society and the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association secured a [legal victory](#) for the species.

“Based on the current threats to this endangered species, we are thrilled that the Florida bonneted bat critical habitat designation has been published,” said Melqui Gamba-Rios, Ph.D., regional director for Latin America and Caribbean for Bat Conservation International. “It is reassuring the Service listened to extensive public comments and incorporated the most recent scientific findings when publishing this critical habitat designation. This is an integral tool for promoting the recovery and long-term protection of endangered species, and we look forward to working with the Service to develop and implement the Florida bonneted bat recovery plan.”

Animals with federally protected critical habitat are more than [twice as likely](#) to be moving toward recovery than species without such protections. Federal agencies that fund or permit projects in critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure this habitat is not harmed or destroyed by their actions.

Named for the broad ears that hang over their foreheads, bonneted bats are the largest of Florida’s 13 bat species and the second largest in North America. The bats roost in old tree cavities and artificial structures and forage for insects over open spaces like wetlands and fresh water. They also use one of the lowest-frequency echolocation calls of all bats, so some people are actually able to hear the bonneted bats’ bird-like chirps as they hunt for insects.

Florida bonneted bats have one of the smallest ranges of any bat species. They live only in South Florida — an area that’s highly susceptible to rising sea levels and destructive development. Projections indicate that sea levels will rise between 3 and 6 feet within much of the bats’ habitat over the course of this century.



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.

Bat Conservation International is a global conservation organization dedicated to ending bat extinctions. Bat Conservation International works worldwide to conserve caves, restore critical habitats in danger, and ensure the survival of the world's bat species. For more information, visit batcon.org.