

Current Event Assignment

According to FederalRegister.gov, on October 31st 2016, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final rule concerning the endangered status of 10 animal species, and 39 plant species from the Hawaiian islands. This rule appoints these 39 species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. As stated by Smith in our class text, “The Endangered Species act authorizes the National Marine Fishery Service, an agency within the Department of Commerce, to identify endangered and threatened marine species”. The Act determines whether a species is endangered by considering five factors: the threatened destruction or modification of a habitat, over-utilization for commercial or recreational uses (I.E problems like overfishing), disease or predation, inconsistent regulatory mechanisms within a habitat, and any other natural or human caused factor affecting their continued existence. In the case of these 49 species recently listed in Hawaii, one of the main causes is urbanization. According to the Federal Register, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued this rule due to six apparent threats: (1) Habitat loss and degradation due to urbanization, (2) predation by nonnative rats and insects, (3) natural occurring events such as landslides, flooding, droughts and hurricanes, (4) human activity, water pollution, manmade structures and artificial lighting, (5) Vulnerability due to small number of animals within species, lack of growth (6) Competition. The rule also points out that the environmental effects from climate change would increase the impact of these threats drastically. Within the peer review of the Rule, one of the many comments stated that sea-level rise and coastal inundation collectively are also potential future threats to the welfare of some of these endangered species. Among the 10 animal species are the band-rumped storm-petrel birds, the orangeblack Hawaiian damselfly, the anchialine pool shrimp, and seven yellow-faced bee species, adding to our ever growing bee problem. According to our text, Smith mentions that “habitat destruction and extinction of plant species is most closely related to deforestation, desertification, and air and water pollution”. It is clear that it is not only one but many forces acting upon Hawaii’s environment that led to the endangerment of these species. Human pressure and urbanization in coastal areas sets the stage for this kind of situation. Overfishing, excessive hunting and habitat destruction on our side clearly points out the severity of our common pool resource management issues. Under the Endangered Species Act, the next step toward the protection of these species would be to designate ‘critical habitats’ within Hawaii’s natural environment. Due to designating critical habitats taking up much scientific research and analysis, the FWS has said none are determinable at this time. Tying back to the coastal zone management reading, the Hawaii department of Health acknowledged that “protecting wildlife and plants can often be important for human and environmental health” and that “Protection of coastal and wetland habitat such as that populated by the anchialine pool shrimp, limits further human pressures on our sensitive coastlines and aquatic environments”. The service has yet to include the public in their actions, one public commenter suggested they should begin public forums, outreach, and host meetings for community improvement groups instead of waiting for the establishment of critical habitats.

References:

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Endangered Status for 49 Species From the Hawaiian Islands. (2016). Retrieved November 16, 2016, from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/30/2016-23112/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-endangered-status-for-49-species-from-the-hawaiian>

Smith, Z. A. (2013). *The environmental policy paradox*. 6th Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall