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Contact: Ragan Whitlock, Center for Biological Diversity, (727) 426-3653, rwhitlock@biologicaldiversity.org
Dennis Olle, Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association, (305) 539-7419, dolle@carltonfields.com
Ana Lima, Tropical Audubon Society, (917) 921-9291, communications@tropicalaudubon.org

Legal Victory Compels Habitat Protection for Endangered Florida Bonneted Bat

Bat Extremely Vulnerable to Habitat Destruction, Sea Level Rise

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.— The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [agreed](#) today to propose critical habitat for the endangered Florida bonneted bat by Nov. 15, 2022, marking a legal victory for the Center for Biological Diversity, Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association and Tropical Audubon Society. The indigenous bat presently faces devastating habitat loss from sea level rise and urban sprawl.

“The Florida bonneted bat’s habitat is disappearing before our very eyes, so federal action is absolutely crucial,” said Ragan Whitlock, a Florida-based attorney at the Center. “Protecting the places these bats call home is long overdue, but I’m happy the necessary safeguards will be in place soon.”

Development and pesticide use nearly drove Florida bonneted bats extinct before [litigation](#) filed by the Center compelled the Service to protect the bat in 2013 under the Endangered Species Act. Conservation groups again sued in [2018](#) and [2022](#) to protect the bat’s dwindling habitat.

“It is unfortunate that conservation groups have to routinely sue the USFWS in order to compel them to do their job, especially in circumstances as clear as that presented by the Florida bonneted bat’s need for critical habitat designation,” said Dennis Olle, president of the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. “We hope this agreement will finally secure a better future for the bat but stand ready to keep fighting until this incredibly vulnerable species gets the protections it deserves.”

“Without immediate action we might lose this fragile species, so the fact that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is finally taking the necessary step of proposing critical habitat for the bat is hopeful,” said Lauren Jonaitis, conservation director of Tropical Audubon Society. “Every species counts because biodiversity is essential to the ecosystems we all rely upon to eat, breathe and thrive.”

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.

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 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 bats are the largest found in the state and get their common name from the broad ears that extend over their foreheads like bonnets. *Continued >*



Florida bonneted bat. Credit: Kathleen Smith / 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.