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Proposed Rule to Change the Status of Pillar Coral

What action is NOAA Fisheries taking?

NOAA Fisheries is publishing a proposed rule to change the status of pillar coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*) from threatened to endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

What is the difference between threatened and endangered status under the ESA?

A species is 'endangered' when it is currently in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A species is 'threatened' when it is likely to become endangered throughout all or a significant portion of the species' range within the foreseeable future.

Why is NOAA Fisheries changing the status of pillar coral under the ESA?

A requirement of the ESA is to review the status of listed species at least every 5 years. During the most recent 5-year review, NOAA Fisheries determined that pillar coral met the definition of an endangered species and recommended a change in its listing status.

What factors contribute to the status of pillar coral?

Pillar coral was listed as threatened in 2014 because of its susceptibility to multiple threats, including ocean warming, ocean acidification, disease, nutrient enrichment, sedimentation, trophic effects of fishing, and inadequate regulatory mechanisms to address global threats. Since then, pillar coral has experienced substantial population decline, primarily due to its high susceptibility to stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD), which has emerged as a devastating and deadly new disease, and warrants a change to endangered status under the ESA.

Does the proposed change in status have any relationship with the current coral bleaching event or the recent designation of coral Critical Habitat?

No. Although ocean warming is a threat that can result in coral bleaching, the proposed change in status was recommended in the most recent 5-year review and is a result of population decline, primarily due to stony coral tissue loss disease. Critical Habitat must be designated for



If the proposed rule to change the status of pillar coral becomes final, pillar coral will be the first coral species within U.S. waters to be listed as endangered.

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the protection, conservation, and recovery of more than 160 endangered and threatened marine and anadromous species under the Endangered Species Act. The goal of the Endangered Species Act is to conserve these species and the ecosystems on which they depend.

species listed under the Endangered Species Act and is not dependent on whether a species is listed as threatened or endangered.

Is this the final step in the process?

No, the proposed rule will be open for public comment for 60 days, and a final listing determination will be issued within one year.

Will there be any new restrictions as a result of the change in status of pillar coral from threatened to endangered?

Yes, the ESA describes a number of prohibited actions that will automatically apply to pillar coral if it is finalized as an endangered species. These prohibitions include importing, exporting, engaging in foreign or interstate commerce, or “taking” of the species. “Take” is defined under the ESA as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct.” These prohibitions will apply to all persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, including in the United States, its territorial sea, or on the high seas.

Will there be any new permits required to conduct research on or restoration of pillar coral as a result of the change in status of pillar coral?

Yes, any research or restoration activities that may cause “take” of pillar coral will need an ESA Section 10(a)(1)(A) permit issued by NOAA Fisheries.

What if I had pillar coral in my possession prior to its change in status from threatened to endangered? Will I need to get an ESA permit to keep my pillar coral?

No, continued possession of pillar coral parts or live pillar coral that were in captivity at the time of final up-listing to an endangered species does not require an ESA permit, nor does providing proper care of live pillar coral held in captivity. We suggest individuals submit information to NOAA Fisheries on the pillar coral in their possession to establish their claim of possession.

For more information:

Website

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/pillar-coral#conservation-management>

Contact

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