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For Immediate Release

1.5-million acres of lifesaving habitat proposed for endangered Florida Bonneted Bat by U.S. Fish and Wildlife

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed designation of 1.5 million acres as critical habitat for the Florida bonneted bat in response to a legal agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity, Tropical Audubon Society and the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. The bat is found only in South Florida where its population declined steeply as its forest and wetland habitats were developed and/or denigrated by pesticides for decades. As a result, it was listed as an endangered species in 2013, yet the Service failed to designate lifesaving critical habitat as required.

The 1.5 million acres of Florida bonneted bat critical habitat finally proposed are located in areas of Charlotte, Collier, DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Lee, Miami-Dade, Monroe and Sarasota counties; each area possesses the physical and biological features necessary for the species survival and recovery.

“Designation of this critical habitat is an indispensable step toward protection of this unique South Florida species,” says Paola Ferreira, executive director of Tropical Audubon Society. “The Florida bonneted bat’s survival required urgent conservation action given the continued threats it faces from habitat destruction and sea level rise.” Ferreira also notes that “Protecting habitat for the Florida bonneted bat will also contribute to the conservation of important bird species and other species in peril.”

Named for the broad ears that hang over its forehead, the bonneted bat is the largest of Florida’s 13 bat species and the second largest in North America. It roosts in old tree cavities and artificial structures, and forages for insects over open spaces such as wetlands and open fresh water. It also uses one of the lowest-frequency echolocation calls of all bats, so some people are actually able to hear the bonneted bat’s bird-like chirps as it hunts insects.

Jaclyn Lopez, Florida director at the Center for Biological Diversity notes that Fish and Wildlife’s proposal was long overdue: “These safeguards are essential to bringing these spectacular bats back from the edge of extinction. With development ongoing across South Florida and sea levels rising, critical habitat protections give Florida’s bonneted bats a fighting chance at survival,” she says. *Continued on Page 2 >*

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The suit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Tropical Audubon Society and the Miami Blue Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association in October 2018 sought precisely that: Winning critical habitat protection for the Florida bonneted bat.

Although bats in China's Wuhan Province have been identified as a possible source for COVID-19, neither the Florida bonneted bat nor any other North American bat carries the virus, and none pose a risk to humans.

Every year, bats provide billions of dollars' worth of natural pest control by consuming tons of insects that would otherwise attack crops and trees. Without bats, farmers and foresters would potentially employ more pesticides, spend more money and adversely impact the environment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is accepting comments on its proposal up until August 10, 2020. Visit <http://ow.ly/SRxN3oqOcsd> for more information.

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