

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

American eel

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Salmon are perhaps the most famous migratory fish in the United States, but here in the east, from Greenland to South America, we have the American eel. Spending most of its time in rivers, all American eels migrate to the Sargasso Sea to reproduce, and then young eels return to rivers to become adults.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently announced that the American eel may need federal protection as a threatened or endangered species, following review of a request to protect the species under the Endangered Species Act. The recent decision was based on information about the eel provided in a 2010 request from the Council for Endangered Species Act Reliability and in the Service's own files.

The Service will begin an extensive review of the American eel to determine if adding the species to the endangered species list is warranted. A previous review was done in 2007, finding that federal protection under the Endangered Species Act was not called for. The 2010 petition includes some information that became available after the 2007 review, including indications that changes in ocean conditions may be negatively impacting the eel's reproduction rates.

The American eel has disappeared from portions of its historical freshwater habitat during the last 100 years, mostly resulting from dams built through the 1960s. Habitat loss and degradation, harvest, and turbine mortality have also contributed to some local population declines.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.