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## **New Report Shows Red Knot Faces Extinction**

Conservation Groups Demand Review of Decision Not to List the Bird

Washington, D.C. – A new status assessment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) shows that numbers of a rare migratory shorebird, the rufa red knot, continue to decline dramatically. The plunging numbers, according to the report, boost the likelihood that the red knot could be extinct “within the next decade.”

The release last Friday of this long-awaited assessment of the rufa subspecies of the red knot confirms the information that conservation groups presented to FWS in 2005 in two detailed petitions seeking protection for the bird under the Endangered Species Act. Both petitions were denied by FWS. In light of this new comprehensive report, the groups believe that FWS has no further excuse not to list the knot as endangered.

The report was issued on the same day that FWS announced it would review agency actions regarding eight species where Deputy Interior Secretary Julie MacDonald, a political appointee, inappropriately influenced scientific decisions. The groups are also calling on FWS to re-examine its December 2005 decision not to emergency list the red knot to ensure that proper procedures were followed by the agency.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service’s own assessment demonstrates that the red knot is on a path to extinction and warrants the protection of the Endangered Species Act,” said Caroline Kennedy, senior director for field conservation at Defenders of Wildlife. “With such clear evidence at hand, it seems likely that the agency’s decision not to offer federal protection to the red knot was based on politics, not science.”

The report identifies the main threat to the red knot as “the reduced availability of horseshoe crabs eggs in Delaware Bay arising from elevated harvest of adult crabs for bait in the conch and eel fishing industries.” Red knots rely on horseshoe crab eggs to gain the weight they need to successfully complete a nonstop flight to their Canadian arctic breeding grounds. Since the 1990s, over-harvesting of horseshoe crabs has caused the supply of eggs to plummet, and red knot numbers in Delaware Bay have declined from a high of more than 100,000 birds in the 1980s to fewer than 15,000 today.

“Today’s red knot update from the Fish and Wildlife Service is further proof that the federal government and states need to take immediate and effective action now, or our children won’t get to see these amazing shorebirds,” said Darin Schroeder, managing director of conservation advocacy for the American Bird Conservancy.

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“The science is clear - red knots are facing imminent risk of extinction,” said Eric Stiles, vice president for conservation and stewardship for the New Jersey Audubon Society. “The Delaware Bay is rapidly descending toward ecological disaster. We must act now to protect this world-class shorebird and horseshoe crab spectacle for future generations.”

In September 2006, FWS categorized the red knot as a candidate for endangered species listing but said its status did not warrant priority listing. The knot joined more than 275 other species languishing on this waiting list, where the average wait for protection is about 15 years. That’s more time than the agency claims the red knot has left.

“The Bush administration’s failure to protect the red knot despite ample evidence that it is hurtling toward extinction is inexcusable,” said Tim Dillingham, executive director of the American Littoral Society. “Unless the Fish and Wildlife Service acts now to provide meaningful protections for red knots and their habitat, we could be the last generation to experience the migration of red knots through Delaware Bay.”

In May 2006, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) failed to approve a moratorium on the harvest of horseshoe crabs and instead supported reduced quotas and the take only of male crabs. According to the status assessment, conservation actions taken to date regarding the horseshoe crab harvest may have stabilized the crab population but there is no evidence of recovery.

“One of the primary conclusions from this assessment is the critical link between reduced horseshoe crab egg densities and the decline of the red knot,” said Nicholas DiPasquale, conservation chair for Delaware Audubon. “We must make every effort to optimize the availability of horseshoe crab eggs if this bird is to survive.”

“The whole world is watching,” said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. “So far we have been failing horribly in taking the aggressive steps necessary to protect the red knot from extinction. The ecological relationship between the red knot and the horseshoe crabs are critical for our local ecosystems and economy - we cannot afford to fail, on any level.”

The Bush administration has added the fewest number of species to the endangered list than any other administration since 1973. To date, the Bush administration has protected just 58 species under the Endangered Species Act, compared to 512 under the Clinton administration and 231 under the administration of George H.W. Bush.

A copy of the status assessment can be found on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website:

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/endangered/Red%20Knot%20Assessment%20May%202007.standard.pdf>.