

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release December 27, 1976

McGarvey 202/343-5634

## CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR THE PALILA, A SMALL HAWAIIAN BIRD

The palila, a small bird of the Hawaiian honeycreeper family, found only in a small area on the Island of Hawaii, now may have a better chance of survival and recovery because essential parts of its forest habitat on the slopes of Mauna Kea have been proposed for "critical habitat" by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The public is invited to comment on this proposal. All comments received through April 18, 1976, will be considered.

In effect, the proposed measure delineates specific areas of habitat in which Federal agencies would have to assess their actions relative to their impact on the bird. This requirement is the only direct meaning of the proposal. Non-Federal actions will in no way be affected by this proposal unless they are in some way federally authorized or funded.

At one time the palila was widely distributed in the forests of the Island of Hawaii, mainly between 4,000 and 10,000 feet in elevation. Because of destruction of the palila's habitat by agriculture, the grazing of introduced ungulates, and human forest clearing activities, the species now is restricted to a relatively small area above 7,000 feet in elevation on the slopes of Mauna Kea. This area, which is to be determined as critical habitat, consists primarily of mamani and naio forests. The mamani is a tree of the Hawaiian Islands mountains having very hard,

(over)

durable wood much valued for fenceposts. The naio, known as bastard sandalwood, is a tall tree that has rough gray bark and pink or white flowers in terminal clusters that yields a lumber which is sometimes substituted for sandalwood. The palila depends on the mamani and naio trees for food, shelter, and nesting sites; it cannot survive without these tree species. Feral, or wild, sheep, prized by some for hunting, and other introduced ungulates, are detrimental to the vegetation on which the palila depends.

The designation of critical habitat would aid Federal agencies in knowing where such habitat is located, and thus in bringing their actions into conformity with the Act.

The delineated area apparently contains the world's entire known population of palila, and supports most of the large and intermediate-sized mamani and naio trees on Mauna Kea. This area is large enough to allow space for the population to expand, and includes a full range of altitudinal and geographical sites needed by the palila for normal life cycle movement. Such movement is the response of the species to shifting seasonal and annual patterns of flowering, seed set, and ensuing pod development of the mamani vegetation.

x      x      x

INT: 1162-76