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U.S. NEWS

## Trump administration delays decision on federal protections for monarch butterflies



A monarch butterfly feeds on milkweed Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Chicago. (AP Photo/Erin Hooley, File)



BY **TODD RICHMOND**

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MADISON, Wis. (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration has delayed a decision on whether to extend federal protections to monarch butterflies indefinitely despite years of warnings from conservationists that populations are shrinking.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [announced](#) during the waning days of then-President Joe Biden's term in December 2024 that the agency planned to add the beloved backyard pollinator to the threatened species list by the end of 2025, calling the insect "iconic" and "cherished across North America."

But the Trump administration quietly listed the effort as a "long-term action" in a September report on the status of federal regulatory initiatives from the Office of Management and Budget. The designation does not mean the administration has blocked the fish and wildlife service from making the decision, only that it will not come within the year that began in September.

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“The administration remains committed to a regulatory approach that is transparent, predictable and grounded in sound science,” an agency spokesperson wrote in an email to The Associated Press on Friday. “Any listing must follow the (Endangered Species Act’s) statutory requirement that determinations be based on the best scientific and commercial data available. At the same time, the administration continues to emphasize voluntary, locally driven conservation as a proven tool for supporting species and reducing the need for additional federal regulation.”

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No one at the agency immediately returned follow-up emails inquiring about the specific rationale for the delay. The first Trump administration named the monarch a candidate for listing in December 2020. His second administration has made oil and gas production a centerpiece and has been working to strip away environmental regulations that impede development.

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His administration moved in November to [roll back blanket protections](#) for threatened animals and plants, requiring government agencies to instead craft species-specific rules, a potentially lengthy process. Other proposals call for bypassing species protections for logging in national forests and on public lands.

The Center for Biological Diversity and other conservation groups started pushing for federal protections for the butterfly in 2014, petitioning the fish and wildlife service to list the insect. The center sued in 2022 to force the agency to make a listing decision.

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Tierra Curry, the center's endangered species co-director, said Friday that she's not surprised the Trump administration has delayed the decision. She said it can take more than a decade to get a species listed. For example, she said, the Miami Blue Butterfly was finally listed as endangered in 2012 after waiting on the candidate list since 1984. The Dakota Skipper butterfly became a candidate in 1984 but was not listed as threatened until 2014, she added.

The long-term action designation doesn't mean the end for monarch protections but it does place them in "bureaucratic limbo," she said.

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"It's absolutely disappointing because monarchs need all the help they can get," Curry said.

Monarchs are found across North America. Known for their distinctive orange-and-black wings, they're a symbol of sunny summer days.

But environmentalists have warned that monarch populations are shrinking due to climate change and rural development. Fish and wildlife service experts said when they announced in December 2024 that they planned to list the butterfly that monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains face a 57% to 74% probability of extinction by 2080. Monarchs west of the Rockies have a 95% chance of becoming extinct by then.

The monarch listing proposal would generally prohibit people from killing or transporting the butterfly. People and farmers could continue to remove milkweed, a key food source for monarch caterpillars, from their gardens, backyards and fields but would be barred from making changes that would make the land permanently unusable for the species.

People could continue to transport fewer than 250 monarchs and could continue to use them for educational purposes.

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The proposal also would designate as critical habitat 4,395 acres (1,779 hectares) in seven coastal California counties where monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains migrate for winter. The designation would prohibit federal agencies from destroying or modifying that habitat. The designation doesn't prohibit all development, but landowners who need a federal license or permit for a project would have to work with the wildlife service to mitigate damage.

**TODD RICHMOND**

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## Conversation



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I remember,ember a time when monarchs would land on your hand. They were our friends reminding us that they were here. I only seen two monarchs this summer and fall. Our friends that help pollinate are definitely in trouble.

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