

Feds approve new ocelot reintroduction plan

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The US Fish and Wildlife service signed off on a new plan to help bring back the ocelots in South Texas.

The ocelot "safe harbor agreement" was formally signed Tuesday at the El Sauz Ranch in Willacy County.

The agreement provides leeway from the government to landowners in South Texas for the management of ocelots.

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Landowners previously expressed concerns that having ocelots on their land could be a liability because they're protected under the endangered species act.

The new rule would let landowners in South Texas sign an agreement with the feds to make new space for ocelots, and not worry if their ranch or land operations accidentally harm an ocelot.

"It's a huge step in ocelot conservation in Texas, and the United States because it's one landowner that's making a commitment with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and its landowner based," Texas A&M Kingsville ocelot researcher Mike Tewes said. "The recovery of ocelots in Texas can only be done by private landowners, since 96% is privately owned."

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The fish and wildlife service, the East Foundation and other partners are looking to reintroduce ocelots to rural land in the counties of Brooks, Hidalgo and Starr.

A plan to breed ocelots for this reintroduction is already underway.