Least Shrew (Cryptotis parva)

Pennsylvania Endangered Mammal Species
State Rank: S1B (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G5 (secure)

Identification
The total length of an adult least shrew is three to 3 ½ inches. Its tail length ranges from ½ to ¼ inches, which is the shortest tail of all Pennsylvania shrews. It has a black and ashy-gray belly. The only other species of shrew with a short tail, the northern short-tailed shrew, is larger (total length is four to five inches) and is dark slate colored.

Biology-Natural History
The least shrew is found throughout much of the eastern United States, ranging from Central America north and east to New York and Connecticut. Historically, this species may have been found throughout Pennsylvania. Most records, however, are confined to non-forested habitats in southern and western Pennsylvania. Least shrews have up to three litters, averaging five young per litter, between March and November. Like other shrews, they feed mainly on insects, earthworms and other invertebrates.

Habitat
Unlike other shrews, this species does not inhabit moist, mature forests. Instead, it lives in meadows, pastures, old fields and other non-forested habitats.

Reasons for Being Endangered
Post-1970 surveys at historic Pennsylvania sites failed to reveal this species. In fact, numerous surveys in likely habitats have resulted in the collection of only three specimens in more than 20 years. Because this is a farmland shrew, it might have declined as a result of "DDT-era" (pre-1972) pesticide use. The loss of croplands to development and more intensive use of remaining farmlands may also be contributing to the apparent decline and current rarity of this shrew.

Management Practices
Management practices beneficial for the short-eared owl and other grassland animals should also benefit the least shrew. Surveys to find this species need to be intensified. If found, populations should be protected. Habitat studies in the vicinity of known populations on public lands should precede restoration efforts.

North American State/Province Conservation Status
Map by NatureServe (August 2007)

State/Province Status Ranks
- SX: presumed extirpated
- SH: possibly extirpated
- S1: critically imperiled
- S2: imperiled
- S3: vulnerable
- S4: apparently secure
- S5: secure
- Not ranked/under review

References: