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News Release



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DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS REVEALS MINIMAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSERVATION OF ENDANGERED SAN DIEGO COUNTY PLANT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft economic analysis concluding that costs related to conservation actions for willow monardella and its proposed critical habitat will be minimal over the next 20 years.

Of the 2,539 acres of land in San Diego identified as potential critical habitat for the plant, the Service determined that only about 115 acres should be proposed for the designation because the remaining lands are already conserved within a Wilderness Area on Otay Mountain, are on Department of Defense lands that are covered by an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan, or are addressed under the San Diego County Multiple Species Conservation Program.

Nearly all of the land proposed for critical habitat designation is anticipated to be part of a future open space reserve for the Fanita Ranch development project. Estimated costs associated with conservation actions for willow monardella within the future reserve are about \$80 per acre annually.

Concurrent with the release of the draft economic analysis, the Service is reopening the public comment period on proposed critical habitat for willow monardella through July 03, 2006.

Willow monardella is a member of the mint family that occurs in washes and floodplains along ephemeral streams. The plant tends to grow in groupings, referred to as clumps, rather than discreet plants and has an extremely limited geographic range – it is found in scattered locations between Los Penasquitos Canyon and Mission Gorge, and Otay Mesa in San Diego County, California, and northern Baja California, Mexico. Currently, 11 occurrences of the plant are known to exist in San Diego County. The area proposed as critical habitat is located in the Sycamore Canyon drainage, which supports one of the largest occurrences of willow monardella in California.

The plant was listed under Endangered Species Act (ESA) as an endangered species. The Service published the proposed rule to designate critical habitat for willow monardella on November 9, 2005.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain physical and biological features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit

activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic, national security, and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of the species.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or by facsimile to 760/431-9624. Electronic comments may be submitted to FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov.

Copies of the draft economic analysis and proposed rule can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad/> or by calling the Carlsbad Office at 760/431-9440.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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