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News Release



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DRAFT RECOVERY PLAN PUBLISHED FOR RARE PLANT

60-day comment period opens today

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it is seeking public review and comment on a draft recovery plan for the showy stickseed (*Hackelia venusta*), one of the rarest plants in Washington State.

Notice of availability of the draft recovery plan was published in today's *Federal Register* and opens a 60-day public comment period that will end on May 12, 2006. The plant was listed as endangered on February 6, 2002. Critical habitat has not been designated for this species.

"We encourage people to comment on this draft plan, and we welcome ideas and partnerships that could bring the showy stickseed back from the brink of extinction," said Dave Allen, Director of the Service's Pacific Region.

The draft recovery plan describes specific criteria and calls for immediate action to reduce threats, stabilize the only known population and increase population size and numbers across the estimated historical range of the species.

Among the plan's recommendations is a call for continuing partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service, Washington Department of Transportation, botanical gardens and academic institutions to effectively conserve and enhance the species and its habitat.

Additionally, the draft recovery plan recommends continuing survey efforts to identify any additional populations that may exist but are currently unknown. In order to reduce the potential for extinction due to the catastrophic loss of the single small population, recovery actions will likely require increasing the area occupied by the existing population where space and habitat allow, as well as establishing new populations within the estimated historical range of the species.

Threats such as over-utilization, noxious weeds and shading and competition from trees must be sufficiently controlled to allow for this population expansion. Effective management and reintroduction

will require gaining further knowledge of the species and the functioning of its ecosystem. Therefore, research and monitoring are key components of the recovery strategy.

The showy stickseed draft recovery plan was developed by Service biologists as well as botanists, plant ecologists, and planners from the U.S. Forest Service, the Washington Department of Natural Resources's Natural Heritage Programs and non-governmental organizations.

Showy stickseed is in the forget-me-not family and has large attractive white or whitish-blue flowers. The species is native to Chelan County, Washington State, where it is found in open areas of steeply sloping, highly unstable sand and granite cliffs. Only a single population of about 600 plants is known to exist, occurring primarily on Federal lands near the city of Leavenworth, Washington. A very small portion of the population is located on private lands.

The primary threats to showy stickseed include collection and physical disturbance to the plants and habitat by humans; mass wasting (landslides); nonnative noxious weeds; competition and shading from native trees and shrubs due to fire suppression; some highway maintenance activities; low seedling establishment; and the small size and restricted distribution of the single population of the species, which makes it vulnerable to extinction from chance natural or human-caused events.

The goal of the Endangered Species Act is to recover listed species to the point where they are secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems and no longer need federal protection. A recovery plan is a blueprint providing guidance for actions by federal, state and other public agencies and private interests that will lead to recovery through downlisting or delisting a species. Recovery plans are advisory only. They do not obligate the expenditure of funds or require that the recommended actions be implemented.

Written comments, along with any supporting documentation, may be mailed to the Central Washington Field Office, 215 Melody Lane, Suite 119, Wenatchee, WA 98801, attn: Tim McCracken; or faxed to 509-665-3509; or emailed to Szilvia_Redig@fws.gov, with "Showy stickseed comments" in the subject line. The draft recovery plan may be viewed on the internet at <http://pacific.fws.gov/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/default> or <http://www.fws.gov/easternwashington/>.

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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