



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office

Preserving The Biological Diversity Of The Great Basin, Eastern Sierra & Mojave Desert

Questions and Answers

Mt. Charleston Blue Butterfly 90-Day Finding

Q. What is the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly (*Icaricia shasta charlestonensis*)?

A. The Mt. Charleston blue butterfly is a distinctive subspecies of the wider ranging Shasta blue butterfly (*Icaricia shasta*), a member of the Lycaenidae family (little butterfly family). The subspecies is known only to occur at high elevations of the Spring Mountains, located approximately 25 miles west of Las Vegas in Clark County, Nevada. The wingspan of the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly ranges from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch. Males are dark to dull iridescent blue and females are brown with a blue overlay. Their underside is gray, with a pattern of black spots, brown blotches and pale wing veins to give it a mottled appearance. The butterfly requires open habitats that support its larval host plant, Torrey's milkvetch (*Astragalus calycosus* var. *mancus*), which grows at elevations between 5,000 to 10,800 feet on the east side of the Spring Mountains.

Q. Where is the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly located?

A. The core colonies for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly are located on less than 9 acres in Kyle and Lee Canyons, on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Two of the core colonies of the subspecies in Lee Canyon at the Las Vegas Ski and Snowboard Resort total 3.7 acres, while the size of the core colony in Kyle Canyon is estimated at 5 acres.

Q. Why did the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) complete a 90-day finding under the Endangered Species Act for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly?

A. This finding was prepared pursuant to a formal petition received on October 20, 2005, from The Urban Wildlands Group, Inc., requesting the Service list the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as an endangered species under the emergency provision of the Endangered Species Act (Act). The petition states that threats to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly are occurring as a result of activities carried out or permitted by the Forest Service and the species is at risk of extinction. In a letter dated April 20, 2006, the Service responded to the petitioner that initial review did not indicate an emergency situation existed, but if conditions changed an emergency rule could be developed. In the letter we also indicated to the petitioner that we had received funding for and would be proceeding with a 90-day finding.

Q. What were the results of the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly 90-day finding?

A. The Service determined that substantial scientific information exists to warrant a more in-depth examination of its status.

Q. Why did the Service reach a substantial conclusion for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly 90-day finding?

A. There is substantial information presented in the petition that the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the species' habitat or range (Factor A) is a threat to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly. Habitat destruction and modification to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly and its larval host plant, Torrey's milkvetch, including impacts at one core colony, was documented in Lee Canyon from multiple projects implemented since 2000. In addition, a core colony in Kyle Canyon is bisected by the South Loop Trail and is affected by an additional unsanctioned trail.

The petition provides substantial information that inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms (Factor D) is also a threat to the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly. While there are existing agreements in place that intended to conserve the subspecies, to date these agreements either have not been implemented or the limited implementation does not appear to have provided sufficient conservation for this subspecies. Given the uncertain population status of and the 2006 survey results for the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly, it is necessary for the Fish and Wildlife Service to re-evaluate the mechanisms currently in place to protect this subspecies.

Q. Will the 90-day finding impact recreation use at the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area?

A. No, the 90-day finding is only the first step in a process to determine if listing the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly as either threatened or endangered is warranted under the Act.

Q. Has the population of Mt. Charleston Blue butterfly declined?

A. Yes. Based on the State of Nevada Natural heritage Program database and the petition, there were 15 separate locations or occurrences of the butterfly that have been documented since 1928. Based on the opinion of local butterfly experts, the Mt. Charleston blue population has been declining since 1995. Surveys prior to 2006, indicate the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly persists at only three core colonies. Focused surveys in 2006 did not locate any Mt. Charleston blue butterflies throughout its range.

Q. Are there conservation measures in place for conservation of the Mt. Charleston Blue butterfly?

A. Yes, the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly along with 11 invertebrates, 18 animals and 26 plant species endemic to the Spring Mountains, are included in a 1998 Conservation Agreement for the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area signed by the State of Nevada, Forest Service, and the Service. In 2000, the 55 species that are the subject of the Conservation Agreement, including the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly, were incorporated as covered species under the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. A variety of conservation measures have been enacted to benefit endemic species in the Spring Mountains since 1998; however, until recently, relatively few conservation actions have been implemented to prevent the decline of the butterfly.

Q. Where can more information about the Mt. Charleston blue butterfly including copies of the 90-day finding be found?

Copies of the 90-day finding are available on the internet at <http://www.fws.gov/nevada>, or by

calling us at (702) 515-5230.

Q How can new information or comments be included in the status review?

A. The Service is soliciting comments, suggestions, and additional information to ensure the status review is complete and based on the best scientific information. Comments, suggestions, or information on the historical and current status and distribution of the butterfly, its biology and ecology, ongoing conservation measures for the species and its habitat, and threats to the species and its habitat will be accepted until **July 30, 2007**. These comments or information should be sent to: Robert D. Williams, Field Supervisor, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4701 North Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130, or by fax at (702) 515-5231.