



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office

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

### *Questions and Answers*

### *Sand Mountain Blue Butterfly 12-Month Finding*

***Q. What is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly?***

**A.** The Sand Mountain blue butterfly is a small, pale-blue butterfly in the Lycaenidae family. Males have a wingspan that averages 0.44 in. The back is pale bluish-violet with a narrow black outer margin. The bottom surface of the male abdomen is chalky white. Females have a wingspan that averages 0.43 in. The back is brown to tan, and usually pale bluish-gray on both wings. The forewing has a faint brown bar, while the hind wing has marginal dots.

***Q. What is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly's habitat?***

**A.** The Sand Mountain blue butterfly is known only to occur at Sand Mountain, a dune system located in Churchill County, Nevada, about 25 miles east of the City of Fallon, in close association with its host plant, Kearney buckwheat. Kearney buckwheat is a long-lived, perennial shrub with numerous branches. The plant typically occurs at Sand Mountain as a dominant or co-dominant with other shrubs on smaller dunes around the periphery of the main dune. Kearney buckwheat is the sole food source for the larvae and an important nectar source for adults during their flight period.

Kearney buckwheat is widespread in Nevada and also occurs in Utah, Arizona, and California. Several reconnaissance surveys of sand dunes have been conducted within a 62.5 mile radius of Sand Mountain in search of populations of the Kearney buckwheat large enough to support a population of the butterfly. No Kearney buckwheat plants have been observed on any of these surveys, and the surveyors concluded that if the plant were present, its population is so small that it would not provide suitable habitat for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly, and that no other habitat exists within the flight range of the butterfly.

***Q. What is the status of the butterfly and it's habitat?***

**A.** Based on surveys during the 2006 flight season an estimated hundreds of thousands of butterflies may have been present. The gradual destruction of the Kearney buckwheat habitat on which the butterfly depends poses a potentially significant threat to the butterfly in the foreseeable future. The Service has concluded that the recent limitation of motorized vehicles to a designated mandatory route system will ensure that further habitat loss does not occur and reduces the significance of this threat.

***Q. Where is the Sand Mountain blue butterfly found?***

**A.** The Sand Mountain blue butterfly occurs on an estimated 1,000 acres within and adjacent to the 4,795 acre Sand Mountain Recreation Area (SMRA) managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

***Q. Why did the Service complete a 12-month finding under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly?***

**A.** On April 23, 2004, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received a formal petition from the Center for Biological Diversity, Xerces Society, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, and the Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association. The petition requested that the Sand Mountain blue butterfly, known only from Sand Mountain, Nevada, be listed as threatened or endangered in accordance with Section 4 of the Act, and that critical habitat be designated for the species concurrent with the listing. On September 26, 2005, the Service received a 60-day notice of intent to sue, and on January 5, 2006, a suit was filed regarding the Service's failure to carry out the 90-day and 12-month findings on the status of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly within the statutory deadline set by the Act.

On August 8, 2006, the Service published a substantial 90-Day Finding in the Federal Register (71 FR 44988-44993) that an in-depth review (12-month finding) was warranted.

***Q. What were the results of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly 12-month finding?***

**A.** After a thorough review of all available scientific and commercial information, the Service finds that listing the Sand Mountain blue butterfly is not warranted.

***Q. What information did the Service consider in the 12-month finding?***

**A.** In addition to information contained in the petition, the Service's files, and information received from the public, the Service consulted with recognized butterfly experts, Federal land managers, and arranged for researchers to initiate field studies to assess the conservation status of the Sand Mountain blue butterfly and establish baseline data which will be used to compare future changes in the butterfly population.

***Q. Did the Service receive any comments?***

**A.** Yes, one comment letter from the Center for Biological Diversity.

***Q. Are there conservation measures underway for the Sand Mountain Blue butterfly?***

**A.** Yes, on August 18, 2004, the Lahontan Valley Environmental Alliance (LVEA) initiated a public planning effort to develop a Conservation Plan for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly. Participants in the working group included representatives from the LVEA, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the City of Fallon, Churchill County, the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe (Tribe), the Friends of Sand Mountain (FOSM), the California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA), the United States Naval Air Station Fallon, and private citizens.

The purpose of the Conservation Plan is to provide long term protection for the Sand Mountain blue butterfly and its habitat; particularly, its host plant, Kearney buckwheat. The Conservation Plan and Agreement identifies specific actions that are necessary to: 1) eliminate or reduce known threats, 2) incorporate species conservation measures into planning and management activities; 3) educate permittees and recreation users, and, 4) monitor species status trends and habitat quality and requirements. One such action is the designation of a mandatory route system to halt further degradation of butterfly habitat.

The Conservation Plan was signed by the Service, BLM, Carson City Field Office, Fallon Paiute Shoshone Tribe, California Off-Road Vehicle Association, Friends of Sand Mountain, and

Churchill County on September 21, 2006.

***Q Will the service continue to monitor the butterfly and consider new information?***

**A.** The Service will continue to assess the status of the butterfly by working with BLM, other parties to the Conservation Plan, university research scientists, and other individuals or groups interested in contributing to the conservation of the species. The Service will focus on the successful implementation of the conservation actions identified in the Plan and the effectiveness of eliminating and reducing the threats identified to the butterfly in the foreseeable future.

***Q. Where can more information about the Sand Mountain blue butterfly including copies of the petition finding be found?***

Copies of the 12-month finding are available on the internet at <http://fws.gov/nevada>, or by calling (775) 861-6300.