



News Release

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Interior Agencies Establish Plan for Recovering Endangered Grand Canyon Plant

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has completed a plan of action for recovering the endangered Sentry milk-vetch, a plant that keeps watch over the canyon. The plan lays out activities to bolster plant populations in the wild, establishes benchmarks for measuring the progress of recovery and estimates costs. The Grand Canyon National Park superintendent has also signed on to the plan.

The sentry milk-vetch's scientific species name *Astragalus "cremnophylax"* means "watchman of the gorge." The purple-flowered plant grows in short, ground-hugging mats up to 10 inches in diameter on a specific layer of Kaibab limestone along the south rim of Grand Canyon National Park. Only three small Sentry milk-vetch populations are known today – approximately 332 plants at Maricopa Point, three plants at Grandview Point and an estimated 220 individuals at Lollipop Point.

The main threats to the species are its low density, reproductive potential and genetic variability; limited distribution; the ongoing drought; and decades of park visitor disturbance at Maricopa Point. In 1990, the Park Service built a fence that diverted foot traffic around the Maricopa Point population.

The plan sets two benchmarks to achieving full recovery success under the Endangered Species Act. The first is to establish four wild populations, each with at least 1000 plants. At that point, the milk-vetch can be downlisted from endangered to threatened. Second, double the 1000-plant population number to a total of eight. At eight populations, the plant can be safely removed from Endangered Species Act protection.

The recovery plan calls for the continued protection, management and monitoring of known Sentry milk-vetch populations and habitat; surveys to determine if other populations exist; research on the plant's ecology to determine its habitat requirements; and, establishing new wild populations. A greenhouse population is to be established at The Arboretum at Flagstaff to hold and develop seed and plant stock for starting additional wild populations or restoring populations that may be lost due to catastrophes. The Arboretum will also facilitate the continued study of the milk-vetch.

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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