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News Release



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SERVICE RELEASES DRAFT ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT FOR FIVE CARBONATE PLANTS FROM THE SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS

Public Comment accepted until October 21, 2002

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a draft analysis showing the economic impacts of designating approximately 13,180 acres of land as critical habitat for five endangered plants found only in the San Bernardino Mountains of southern California.

The five plants are the Cushenbury milk-vetch (*Astragalus albens*), Cushenbury buckwheat (*Eriogonum ovalifolium* var. *vineum*), San Bernardino Mountains bladderpod (*Lesquerella kingii* ssp. *bernardina*), and Cushenbury oxytheca (*Oxytheca parishii* var. *goodmaniana*), and the federally threatened Parish's daisy (*Erigeron parishii*). They are collectively referred to as carbonate plants because they grow primarily on soils derived from limestone, dolomite, or other areas rich in calcium carbonate. Comments on today's draft economic analysis and the proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the carbonate plants will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., October 21, 2002.

Economic & Planning Systems, Incorporated (EPS), under subcontract to Industrial Economics, Incorporated (IEc), prepared the draft analysis for the Service's Division of Economics. The company identified costs associated with the plants' listing under the Endangered Species Act and the proposed designation of critical habitat. A separate cost estimate was made for project modifications attributable solely to the designation of critical habitat.

Cost of project modifications due to listing and critical habitat could range from \$174 million to \$281 million over the next 60 years, according to the draft analysis. Modifications due solely to critical habitat could range from \$58,000 to \$89,000, over the next 60 years. Types of projects affected include mining projects on Federal lands, and activities on private land that require a Federal permit.

The purpose of the analysis is to provide a meaningful measure of the economic impacts associated with designating any particular area as critical habitat for the carbonate plants. If the benefits of excluding an area

from critical habitat are greater than the benefits of including it as critical habitat, we may exclude the area from designation unless such exclusion would result in extinction of the species.

Critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. A designation does not set up a preserve or refuge and only applies to situations where Federal funding or permitting is involved. It has no specific regulatory impact on landowners taking actions on their land that do not involve Federal funding or permits. However, under provisions of the ESA, landowners must consult with the Service before taking actions on their property that could harm or kill protected species or destroy their habitat.

Approximately 86 percent of the areas proposed as critical habitat are on federal land, most of which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service's San Bernardino National Forest. A small portion of land proposed as critical habitat is managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and 1,900 acres is under private ownership.

The Service is working with the Forest Service, BLM, and mining interests to develop and implement a Carbonate Habitat Management Strategy to address the long-term conservation of carbonate habitat in the San Bernardino Mountains. A Draft San Bernardino Mountains Carbonate Endemic Plants Recovery Plan was published in 1997 that identified actions needed to conserve and recover the carbonate plants.

Copies of the draft economic analysis and the proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the carbonate plants can be downloaded from the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office's website at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>. If you are unable to access this information on-line or would like us to provide you a hard copy, please contact us at the below address.

Comments and data on the draft economic analysis and the proposed rule to designate critical habitat should be submitted to Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 2730 Loker Avenue West, Carlsbad, California 92008. Comments may also be sent by electronic mail to carbplants@r1.fws.gov. Please submit electronic comments in ASCII file format and avoid the use of special characters and encryption. Please include "Attn: RIN 1018-AI27," and your name and return address in your e-mail message. All comments and materials received by the close of the comment period will be considered in any final determination.

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 more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 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 governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.