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# News Release



<http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad/>

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## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DETERMINED PROPOSING CRITICAL HABITAT FOR CALIFORNIA PLANT NOT PRUDENT**

*5-Year Review of Plant's Status Also Completed*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on September 26 its determination that proposing critical habitat for the Hidden Lake bluecurls, a federally threatened plant, is not prudent. This finding reaffirms a 1998 decision that designating critical habitat was not prudent because of the potential threats to the species resulting from the action.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Hidden Lake bluecurls is a member of the mint family that occurs only at Hidden Lake in Mt. San Jacinto State Park in California. At the time of listing, the primary threat to the species was trampling by visitors to the state park, including horseback riders and hikers. The Service determined designating critical habitat for Hidden Lake bluecurls – a process that requires publication of maps detailing locations of the plant – could increase threats to the species by encouraging more recreational use in its habitat.

The Service made this finding in response to a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Native Plant Society challenging the Service's 1998 not prudent finding. In compliance with the terms of a settlement agreement, the Service re-evaluated the possible benefits and drawbacks associated with proposing critical habitat for Hidden Lake bluecurls.

All of the areas that support the physical and biological elements essential to Hidden Lake bluecurls lie within the boundaries of Mount San Jacinto State Park in a designated State Wilderness Area. The Mt. San Jacinto State Park has undertaken several actions to reduce threats to the species including placing a barrier to keep horses and pack animals away from the sensitive habitat area and removing detailed trail markers and informational materials so as not to intentionally draw attention to the location of the plant.

Additionally, the portion of the state park where the plant is found has been designated as a Natural Preserve which affords conservation of the resources the top priority in terms of management.

Additionally, the Service completed a 5-year review of the plant's status and determined that it should remain protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The ESA requires the Service to review the status of listed species at least once every five years. All relevant information about Hidden Lake bluecurls since its listing in 1998 was assessed as part of the 5-year review.

The Service is accepting comments and information about this proposed not prudent finding until November 27, 2006. Specifically, the Service is requesting information about the extent, condition and distribution of Hidden Lake bluecurls, information on management activities for the species and how these actions may or may not be ameliorating threats to the species and possible risks and benefits of designating critical habitat.

Comments and information should be sent to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, by facsimile to 760-431-9624, or by electronic mail to [FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov](mailto:FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov).

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about Hidden Lake bluecurls is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760/431-9440.

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, 63 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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