

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
6010 Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, California 92011  
Phone: 760-431-9440  
Fax: 760-431-9624

# News Release



<http://carlsbad.fws.gov>

Contact: Jane Hendron, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office – 760/431-9440 Ext. 205

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## **FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DESIGNATES CRITICAL HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED CALIFORNIA BUTTERFLY**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a final rule designating approximately 6,242 acres of land as critical habitat for the federally endangered Laguna Mountains skipper.

Areas designated as critical habitat are limited to portions of the Laguna and Palomar Mountains in San Diego County, California. More than half of the land designated as critical habitat is managed by the U.S. Forest Service's Cleveland National Forest. Approximately 2,345 acres are privately owned and 381 acres are state-owned.

About 422 acres of land identified in the Service's December 13, 2005, proposed rule were removed from the final designation because it was determined these lands did not support the species or its host plant.

A July 7, 2006, draft economic analysis of the Service's critical habitat proposal estimated future impacts could range from \$3.7 to \$5.1 million over the next 20 years. Differences between the high and low impact estimates are primarily the result of uncertainty regarding potential effects on utility, camping and grazing activities.

Habitat features in the areas designated as critical habitat include openings in forest habitat, meadows, and wet areas such as seeps or springs. These areas also support populations of Cleveland's horkelia, the primary host plant for the butterfly.

The Laguna Mountains skipper is one of only two subspecies of *Pyrgus ruralis*, and does not co-occur with the other member of the subspecies. A small butterfly with a one inch wingspan, the Laguna Mountains skipper exhibits a fast, erratic flight pattern. Females lay their eggs on the outer leaves of a host plant – primarily Cleveland's horkelia, but also sticky cinquefoil. It takes approximately 12 to 14 days for the eggs to hatch and about seven weeks for the emerging pupa to reach adulthood.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. 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.

This final rule was prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity in 2003.

A copy of the final rule and other information about the Laguna Mountains skipper is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at telephone number 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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