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News Release



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

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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR THREE SAN BERNARDINO MOUNTAINS PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today published a proposed rule to designate approximately 1,511 acres of land in portions of the San Bernardino Mountains as critical habitat for three federally threatened plants – the Bear Valley sandwort, ash-gray paintbrush, and southern mountain buckwheat.

Almost all the land included in the proposed designation is public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Approximately 4 acres of land is owned by California Department of Fish and Game within the North Baldwin Ecological Preserve and 112 acres is privately owned, a portion of which is managed by the Wildlands Conservancy. Specific areas proposed for the three plants are identified in 11 units and include parts of Big Bear Lake, Broom Flat, Fawnskin, Gold Mountain, Holcomb Valley, Sawmill, Snow Valley, and Sugarloaf.

The three plants grow in pebble plain habitat which includes treeless openings surrounded by woodlands that are remnant of a Pleistocene lake bed. Over time, alternating wet and dry cycles and frost heaving forced quartzite pebbles to the surface. This habitat type is unique to the San Bernardino Mountains.

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.

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

Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until January 22, 2006. Written comments on the proposal should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or by facsimile to 760-431-9624. Comments may also be sent by electronic mail to FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov. Written requests for a public hearing will be accepted until January 8, 2006.

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about the pebble plains plants is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760-431-9440. A draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat is in preparation and will be

released for public review and comment at a later date.

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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