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News Release



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

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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR SAN DIEGO THORN MINT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today published a proposed rule to designate approximately 1,936 acres of land in portions of San Diego County, California, as critical habitat for San Diego thornmint, a federally threatened plant.

Areas proposed for critical habitat designation include the four largest known populations of San Diego thornmint, the only existing population found growing on calcareous soil, and several significant populations consisting of more than 1,000 plants that have a high probability of remaining viable in the long-term.

Although 1,936 acres are identified in the proposed rule, the Service is anticipating excluding all but 634 acres from the final designation. Areas considered for exclusion from the final designation are privately owned and are covered by existing Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP).

The 634 acres being proposed for final designation are public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service's Cleveland National Forest and lands owned by the County of San Diego that are not covered by an HCP.

San Diego thornmint is only found in scattered locations in portions of San Diego County, and in portions of Mexico. This member of the mint family usually occurs on heavy clay soils within openings in coastal sage scrub, chaparral and native grassland habitats.

Areas the Service is proposing for critical habitat designation are identified in 4 separate units. These units cover essential habitat in northern San Diego County within the cities of Carlsbad and Encinitas; central San Diego County, including areas within the City of San Diego; interior portions of the County, including some land in the City of Alpine and on Cleveland National Forest; and the southern part of the County, including some areas near the City of Jamul.

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.

Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until May 14, 2007. 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 April 30, 2007.

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about San Diego thornmint 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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