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News Release



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SERVICE DESIGNATES CRITICAL HABITAT FOR TWO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a final rule designating approximately 431 acres of land as critical habitat for Vail Lake ceanothus and Mexican flannelbush. The lands designated as critical habitat are in portions of Riverside and San Diego counties and are managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Vail Lake ceanothus is found in a few locations in the interior foothills of Riverside County, within chamise-chaparral. Mexican flannelbush grows in seasonal drainages and associated slopes within closed-cone coniferous forest dominated by Tecate cypress and chaparral in the interior foothills of San Diego County and northwestern Baja California, Mexico.

Potential costs associated with conservation actions for these two plants are estimated to be from \$385,000 to \$659,000 over the next 20 years, using undiscounted dollars.

Approximately 213 acres originally proposed for critical habitat designation were excluded from the final designation because conservation of the plants on those lands are covered by either the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan or the San Diego County Multiple Species Conservation Program.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis and other information about Vail Lake ceanothus and Mexican flannelbush 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.

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.

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 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 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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