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News Release



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DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT FOR TWO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PLANTS RELEASED FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of Vail Lake ceanothus and Mexican flannelbush and their proposed critical habitat could range from \$385,000 to \$659,000 over the next 20 years in undiscounted dollars.

With the release of this draft economic analysis, the Service is also reopening the public comment period on the proposed critical habitat rule for the two plants. Comments will be accepted until May 7, 2007.

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.

Of the 283 acres of land included in the critical habitat proposal for Vail ceanothus, approximately 80 acres are being proposed for exclusion from the final designation because they will be conserved under the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The remaining area proposed as critical habitat is on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Land proposed as critical habitat for Mexican flannelbush is on the northwestern side of Otay Mountain, some of which is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The remainder of land proposed for designation is privately owned.

Most of the anticipated costs identified in the draft analysis are related to fire management activities, including creation and maintenance of fuel breaks. These costs are estimated to range from \$221,000 to \$395,000 over the next 20 years in undiscounted dollars. Other costs include those associated with control of non-native invasive plants, administrative costs to conduct consultations with the Service under section 7 of the ESA, and costs to conduct surveys and monitoring of the plant populations.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted electronically to FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov, or to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011. Comments may also be submitted by facsimile to 760-431-5901. Copies of the analysis may be downloaded from the Internet at www.fws.gov/Carlsbad.

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.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic, national security and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

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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