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# News Release



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## **CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR WILLOWY MONARDELLA**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a final rule designating 73 acres of land in the City of Santee, California, as critical habitat for the federally endangered plant, the willowy monardella.

All lands designated as critical habitat are part of the privately owned Fanita Ranch which is planning to include almost all of this acreage in a preserve as part of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

Approximately 2,497 acres of land contains features that are essential to the conservation of the species. Of those, 1,863 acres on Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, are exempt from the designation because they are covered by an approved Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan providing a conservation benefit to the species.

Additionally, 494 acres of land that are part of San Diego County's Multiple Species Conservation Program were excluded from critical habitat because provisions have been made to avoid impacts to willowy monardella; and 67 acres within the Otay Mountain Wilderness were excluded because a 1994 Memorandum of Understanding between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the City and County of San Diego, and the San Diego Association of Governments provides for cooperative conservation and management of the plant in the area.

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

In the absence of Federal involvement, ESA does not provide any greater protection to listed plants on private lands than they already receive under state law. The ESA also does not prohibit "take" of listed plants on private lands, but landowners must still comply with state laws protecting imperiled

plants. Landowners who may have these plants on their property are encouraged to contact the California Department of Fish and Game for guidance.

Willow monardella is a member of the mint family that occurs in washes and floodplains along ephemeral streams. The plant tends to grow in groupings, referred to as clumps, rather than as discreet plants, and has an extremely limited geographic range – it is found in scattered locations between Los Penasquitos Canyon and Mission Gorge, and Otay Mesa in San Diego County, California, and northern Baja California, Mexico. Currently, 11 occurrences of the plant are known to exist in San Diego County.

This final rule was prepared pursuant to a settlement agreement resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by the California Native Plant Society.

Copies of the final rule and other information about willow monardella are available on the Internet at [www.fws.gov/carlsbad](http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad) or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 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, 64 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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