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News Release



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DRAFT ANALYSIS OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSERVATION OF SPREADING NAVARRETIA RELEASED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of the federally threatened *Navarretia fossalis* (spreading navarretia) on 31,086 acres of essential habitat in Los Angeles, Riverside and San Diego counties, California, could range from \$48.6 to \$129 million over the next 20 years, based on a three percent discount rate. Between \$13.9 and \$32.1 million of the total estimated costs apply to the 4,301 acres of land the Service proposed to designate as critical habitat.

According to the draft analysis, between 1998 – when the plant was listed under the Endangered Species Act - and 2005, costs associated with conservation of the species totaled about \$7.9 million.

Most of the potential costs are associated with development activities. Other activities that could incur costs include flood control and transportation projects. The draft analysis estimates costs to acquire, restore and manage habitat for spreading navarretia, conduct consultations with the Service, and comply with environmental regulations such as the California Environmental Quality Act.

“Although 31,086 acres of essential habitat have been identified for spreading navarretia, a large portion of those lands are not proposed as critical habitat because they are already covered by approved Habitat Conservation Plans or Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans,” said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service’s California/Nevada Operations. “However, in the interest of providing a robust economic analysis, all essential habitat was analyzed to determine potential impacts that could result if all those areas were to be designated as critical habitat.”

Lands proposed for critical habitat designation are in portions of Los Angeles and San Diego counties, and are separated into five geographic units.

Public review and comment on the draft economic analysis and proposed critical habitat rule will be accepted until September 14, 2005.

Spreading navarretia, a member of the phlox family, is found in vernal pools, and alkali grasslands, alkali playas, and alkali sinks. The Service listed spreading navarretia as threatened under the ESA in 1998. As a result of lawsuits filed against the Service challenging its failure to designate critical habitat for the plant at the time of listing under the ESA, the Service published a proposed critical habitat rule on October 7, 2004.

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 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.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or transmitted by facsimile to 760-431-9618. Electronic comment submissions may be sent to **fw1cfwo_naf0@fws.gov**.

Copies of the draft analysis and proposed rule are available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by calling 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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