

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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For Release March 29, 2006

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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR TWO WESTERN PEA PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a proposed rule to designate approximately 8,896 acres of critical habitat for two federally endangered plants, Shivwits milk-vetch (*Astragalus ampullarioides*) and the Holmgren milk-vetch (*Astragalus holmgreniorum*). Areas proposed as critical habitat include portions of Mohave County in Arizona and Washington County in Utah.

For the Shivwits milk-vetch, the proposal identifies five units of proposed critical habitat totaling 2,421 acres. Approximately 84 percent of the proposed habitat occurs on Federal lands – with over 50 percent (1,201 acres) on National Park Service lands and the remaining (819 acres) on land owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

For the Holmgren milk-vetch, approximately 6,475 acres are being proposed as critical habitat. Federal lands make up 42 percent of the proposed habitat and occur on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Utah and Arizona. In addition, State owned lands in Arizona (1,499 acres) and Utah (1,902 acres) and 272 acres of privately owned land make up the remainder of the proposed critical habitat.

“The Service is proposing only those areas considered essential to the conservation of the Holmgren and Shivwits milk-vetches,” said Mitch King, the Service’s Director of the Mountain-Prairie region. “To ensure that the final critical habitat designation is as accurate as possible, we encourage people to review our proposal and provide comments and any additional information they believe relevant. The Service will consider all available information before making a final decision.”

Comments on the Service’s proposal should be sent to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2369 West Orton Circle, Suite 50, West Valley City, UT 84119 or electronically mailed to hsmilkvetch@fws.gov, using “Attn: Shivwits or Holmgren milk-vetch” in the subject line of your email by close of business on May 30, 2006. Comments may also be faxed to 801-975-3331.

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. 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.

Both the Shivwits milk-vetch and the Holmgren milk-vetch are members of the pea family. The Shivwits milk-vetch, often associated with purple hued patch of soft clay soil, is found only in southern Washington County, Utah, and numbers less than 2,000 plants. The Holmgren milk-vetch is most frequently found on the skirt edges of hill and plateau formations, slightly above or on the edge of drainage areas in both Washington County, Utah, and Mohave County, Arizona. The population consists of approximately 500 to 10,000 plants depending on yearly conditions. Both species grow on state and private land, as well as land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Rapid urban expansion and population growth in the plants' habitat, which includes construction of new roads, power lines and other development and the spread of noxious weeds, has caused both plants to decline rapidly.

The ESA directs Federal agencies to protect and promote the recovery of Federally listed species. Consequently, Federal lands provide the greatest protection for endangered and threatened plants. It is illegal to collect and remove listed plants from Federal lands and consultation with the Service is required when projects or activities on Federal land may affect the species.

For private and non-federal landowners, however, the ESA does not prohibit "take" of listed plants on private lands and consultations are only required when Federal funding or permitting is involved. Landowners must still comply with State laws protecting imperiled plants.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia and malaria, as well as those used to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service 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 also provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges and State wildlife management areas.

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about Shivwits and Holmgren milk-vetches is available on the Internet at: <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/plants/milkvetche> or by contacting the Service's Utah Field Office at 801-975-3330.

The Service is preparing a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat that 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, 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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