



Questions and Answers

Candidate Conservation Agreement for San Fernando Valley Spineflower

Q. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

A. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is announcing that a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) has been prepared for the San Fernando Valley spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*), a plant species in southern California that has been proposed for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Q. What is a San Fernando Valley spineflower?

A. The San Fernando Valley spineflower is a low-growing herbaceous annual plant in the buckwheat family and is typical of many winter-spring native annuals that occur in the Mediterranean climate of California. Its historical range is thought to extend from near Elizabeth Lake, south through the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles County, to near Santa Ana in Orange County. Presumed to be extinct by the botanical community for more than 70 years, the San Fernando Valley spineflower was rediscovered at two locations in Ventura and Los Angeles counties in 1999 and 2000, respectively.

Q. Where does San Fernando Valley spineflower exist today?

A. The San Fernando Valley spineflower is predominately found within openings of sparsely vegetated scrub communities and grasslands in southern California. There are two known populations of San Fernando Valley spineflower today. One population exists at Laskey Mesa in the Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Open Space Preserve in Ventura County and the second population exists on land owned by Newhall Ranch and Farming Company near Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County.

Q. What are the existing and potential threats to the species?

A. In 2015/2016, the Service conducted an assessment of the past, current and future threats to San Fernando spineflower. Those threats include current and future impacts of habitat loss from proposed development, invasive non-native plants and Argentine ants, current and potential effects of having small, isolated populations, and potential impacts of climate change. A combination of these stressors could impact the long-term viability of San Fernando Valley spineflower.

Q. How are we working with land managers to help conserve this species?

A. The San Fernando Valley spineflower population in Los Angeles County exists on land owned by Newhall Land and Farming Company. The Service has worked with Newhall Land Company to develop and sign a Candidate Conservation Agreement which outlines measures to conserve the species by increasing the number and extent of protected San Fernando Valley spineflower populations. This is being achieved through through outplanting efforts and by working with landowners to protect the plants from stressors related to proposed development through conservation easements and on-going management activities.

The San Fernando Valley spineflower population in Ventura County exists on state protected and conserved lands that are part of the Upper Las Virgines Canyon Open Space Preserve, which is managed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority. The Service is working with land managers to identify and implement conservation and management measures to continue to support this population.

Q. What is a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA)?

A. The Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) is a voluntary conservation agreement between the Service and Newhall Land and Farming Company that outlines the plan to enhance the status of the species and monitor its effectiveness. CCAs are models for public-private partnership to conserve candidate species and promote prelisting conservation.

The San Fernando Valley spineflower CCA describes the strategy to establish new, protected occurrences within the species' historical range that will increase the resiliency of the existing populations and expand the redundancy and representation of the species. Newhall Land and Farming Company will voluntarily conserve an additional 1,498 acres of its property for the benefit of the spineflower and carry out conservation activities within portions of these 1,498 acres and within a portion of the Petersen Ranch Mitigation Bank. Spineflower introduction will occur on a total of at least 10 acres within the conservation areas.

These conservation activities will expand the area of protected conservation land for the plant, increase the number and extent of protected spineflower occurrence locations across its range with outplanting, and provide protection for the introduction sites from development-related stressors with conservation easements and on-going management activities. The implementation of the activities in the CCA will result in at least two new self-sustaining and persistent San Fernando Valley spineflower occurrences and would increase the number of ecoregions in which the species is represented.

Q. What previous federal action has been taken by the Service?

A. The Service designated the San Fernando Valley spineflower as a candidate species for listing under the ESA in the Candidate Notice of Review on October 25, 1999. The species has remained a candidate for listing since 1999. The Service conducted regular reviews of the species' status, all of which determined the species to be warranted for listing but precluded by other listing activities.

On December 6, 1999, and January 27, 2000, the Service received petitions from the city of Calabasas and from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, to list the plant as an endangered species under the ESA.

On September 15, 2016, the Service proposed to list the San Fernando Valley spineflower as threatened under the ESA. On July 19, 2017, the Service announced a six-month extension of the final determination of whether to list the spineflower, as a result of scientific disagreement and uncertainty concerning the species. The Service determined that a six-month extension of the final determination for this rulemaking was needed in order to solicit and consider additional information to help clarify disagreement regarding the potential impact of Argentine ant invasion on San Fernando Valley spineflower and scientific uncertainty related to establishment of the plant using introduction of seed into suitable, unoccupied areas.

Q. What is the purpose of the ESA?

A. The purpose of the ESA is to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, it recognized that our rich natural heritage is of "esthetic, ecological, educational, recreational, and scientific value to our nation and its people." It further expressed concern that many of our nation's native plants and animals were in danger of

becoming extinct.

Q. How does the Service determine whether or not a species should be listed under the ESA?

A. Section 4 of the ESA requires species to be listed as endangered or threatened solely on the basis of their biological status and threats to their existence. When evaluating a species for listing, the Service considers five factors: 1) damage to, or destruction of, a species' habitat; 2) overutilization of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; 3) disease or predation; 4) inadequacy of existing protection; and 5) other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued existence of the species. When one or more of these factors imperils the survival of a species, the Service takes action to protect it. The Service is required to base its listing decisions on the best scientific information available.

For more information about the listing process:

<https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/listing.pdf>

https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/ESA_basics.pdf

Q. When will the Service make a final determination on the species status?

A. The Service will make a final determination on the proposed rule to list the San Fernando Valley spineflower as threatened no later than March 15, 2018.

Q. Has the Service proposed critical habitat for the species at this time?

A. No, the Service has not proposed critical habitat for the species. The ESA requires the Service to designate critical habitat for listed species to the maximum extent prudent and determinable, and we will make such a determination no later than one year following publication of a final rule.

Q. What information is the Service looking for to help make a final determination?

A. The Service intends that any final action resulting from the proposed rule will be based on the best scientific and commercial data available and be as accurate and as effective as possible. Therefore, we request comments or information from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, Native American tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning this proposed rule and the CCA. In consideration of the CCA, we are particularly interested in new information and comments regarding:

(1) The efficacy of seed introduction for long-term establishment into suitable, unoccupied habitat of *Chorizanthe* or related taxa.

(2) Whether the new areas proposed for seeding under the CCA will be appropriate to support populations of San Fernando Valley spineflower.

(3) Whether additional populations established under the CCA will afford sufficient resiliency, redundancy, and representation for the conservation of the species.

Q. How do I submit comments?

A. With the release of the CCA, the Service is reopening the comment period on the proposed rule to list the species for an additional 30 days. The notice is available today in the *Federal Register* Reading Room under Docket No. FWS-R8-ES-2016-0078 and will officially publish on November 13, 2017. The Service will accept public comments on the proposal through the next 30 days until December 13, 2017. Comments may be submitted electronically or by hard copy.

(1) *Electronically*: Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS-R8-ES-2016-0078, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type

heading, click on the “Proposed Rules” link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) *By hard copy*: Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R8–ES–2016–0078; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803. All comments will be posted on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

A copy of the proposed rule, CCA, and other information about the San Fernando Valley spineflower is available at <http://www.regulations.gov> or at <http://www.fws.gov/ventura>.