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News Release



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CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR TWO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a proposed rule to designate approximately 283 acres of land in Riverside County as critical habitat for Vail Lake ceanothus (*Ceanothus ophiochilus*), and 361 acres of land in San Diego County as critical habitat for Mexican flannelbush (*Fremontodendron mexicanum*).

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.

The 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.

Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until December 4, 2006. Written comments on the proposal should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or by facsimile to 760-431-9624. Comments may also be sent by electronic mail to FW8cfwocomments@fws.gov. Written requests for a public hearing will be accepted until November 17, 2006.

A copy of the proposed rules and other information about Vail Lake ceanothus and Mexican flannelbush is available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at telephone number 760-4431-9440.

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.

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

This proposed rule was prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from a lawsuit filed against the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity.

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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