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News Release



Please note:

The zip code for the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office will change to 92011, effective June 27, 2005.

<http://carlsbad.fws.gov>

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CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR MUNZ'S ONION

Endangered Native Plant Occurs Only in Riverside County, California

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a final rule designating approximately 176 acres of land for the federally endangered *Allium munzii* (Munz's onion). All of the area designated as critical habitat lies within the boundaries of the U.S. Forest Service's Cleveland National Forest.

Economic impacts associated with the critical habitat designation on Cleveland National Forest near Elsinore Peak are estimated to be \$33,849 between 2005 and 2025.

Approximately 1,068 acres of land identified as essential to the conservation of the species have been excluded from critical habitat designation because they are covered by the Rancho Bella Vista, North Peak Development Project, Lake Mathews and the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plans.

"The area designated as critical habitat for Munz's onion supports a population of about 5,000 plants and is one of the least disturbed populations of this species that remains," said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service's California/Nevada Operations. "We will continue working closely with the Forest Service to address the conservation needs of this plant."

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.

Munz's onion, a member of the lily family, is restricted to certain clay soils in western Riverside County, California. There are fewer than 19 known populations of Munz's onion. Most of the

populations contain fewer than 1,000 individual plants but there are five larger populations that number between 2,000 and 50,000 plants.

Munz's onion was listed as endangered in October 1998, based on habitat loss resulting from urbanization, agriculture, and clay mining. Several lawsuits were filed by the California Native Plant Society, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Building Industry Legal Defense Foundation seeking to compel the Service to designate critical habitat for Munz's onion, which had not been done at the time the species was listed.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, 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, 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.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about Munz's onion is available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at telephone number 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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