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# News Release



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(SC)

05-123

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For Release: October 13, 2005

## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DETERMINES CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION NOT NECESSARY TO CONSERVE SAN JACINTO VALLEY CROWNSCALE**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published today a final critical habitat rule for the federally endangered *Atriplex coronata* var. *natatior* (San Jacinto Valley crownscale). All areas that contain the features essential to the conservation of San Jacinto Valley crownscale are within the boundaries of the Service-approved Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan; therefore, no lands are being designated as critical habitat for the plant.

Approximately 15,232 acres of land in western Riverside County, California, contain habitat features essential to the conservation of San Jacinto Valley crownscale. These features include vernal pool, alkali grassland, alkali sink, or alkali playa habitats; slow-draining alkali soils containing a hard pan layer, including the Willows, Domino Traver, Waukena, and Chino soils series that provide for a perched water table.

The Western Riverside County MSHCP outlines five specific conservation objectives for San Jacinto crownscale, including providing for at least 6,900 acres of suitable habitat; conducting surveys for the plant in areas of suitable habitat as part of project review; maintaining floodplain processes along the San Jacinto River and Salt Creek; and monitoring and management requirements within the MSHCP conservation area, including an emphasis on preventing the alteration of hydrology and floodplain dynamics, off-road vehicle use, and competition from non-native plant species.

“The Service has determined that the Western Riverside County habitat conservation plan provides adequate conservation for San Jacinto Valley crownscale and that designation of critical habitat for the plant is not necessary” said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service’s California/Nevada Operations.

A draft economic analysis released for public review and comment on August 31, 2005, estimated costs related to conservation activities for San Jacinto Valley crownscale could range from \$16.8 to \$58.8 million over the next 20 years, if the 15,232 acres of land was designated as critical habitat.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies geographic areas that contain physical or biological features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which 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 final rule was prepared pursuant to a court order resulting from lawsuits filed against the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity and California Native Plant Society, and the Building Industry Legal Defense Foundation.

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.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about San Jacinto Valley crowscale is available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by contacting 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 Fish and Wildlife Management 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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