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# News Release



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(SC)

05-081

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For Release: August 31, 2005

## **DRAFT ANALYSIS OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSERVATION OF SAN JACINTO VALLEY CROWNSCALE RELEASED**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the conservation of the federally endangered San Jacinto Valley crownscale (*atriplex coronata* var. *natatior*) and its potential critical habitat could range from \$16.8 to \$58.8 million during the next 20 years.

The Service identified 15,232 acres of land essential for the conservation of the plant in the October 2004 proposed rule. Because this habitat is covered by the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, the Service is not proposing these lands as critical habitat.

“Although the Service is not proposing any lands as critical habitat for San Jacinto Valley crownscale, the draft economic analysis will assist the public and the agency in identifying potential costs that could occur if any or all essential habitat is designated as critical habitat,” said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service’s California/Nevada Operations.

Most of the 15,232 acres of essential habitat for San Jacinto Valley crownscale occurs on privately owned lands, with about 6,535 acres of essential habitat occurring within the boundaries of the State-owned San Jacinto Wildlife Area.

The draft economic analysis estimates costs associated with a variety of conservation activities for San Jacinto Valley crownscale, including costs to acquire, restore and manage habitat for the plant, and costs for Federal agencies to conduct consultations with the Service.

Public review and comment on the draft economic analysis and proposed critical habitat rule will be accepted until September 14, 2005.

San Jacinto Valley crownscale, a member of the goosefoot family, is found only in portions of western Riverside County, California, and was listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1998. As a result of lawsuits filed against the Service challenging its failure to designate critical habitat for the plant at the time of listing under the ESA, the Service published a proposed critical habitat rule on October 6, 2004.

Critical habitat is a term in the 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.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the ESA requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of including it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless this would result in the extinction of a threatened or endangered species.

San Jacinto Valley crownscale grows in seasonal wetlands, including vernal pools and flood plains, in highly alkaline or silty-clay soils. Four major population clusters of the plant have been identified – in the floodplain of the San Jacinto River at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area; the floodplain of San Jacinto River between the Ramona Expressway and Railroad Canyon Reservoir; the Upper Salt Creek vernal pool complex in the western Hemet area; and in the floodplain of Alberhill Creek north of Lake Elsinore.

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.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92011, or transmitted by facsimile to 760-431-9618. Electronic comment submissions may be sent to **[fw1cfwo\\_sjvc@fws.gov](mailto:fw1cfwo_sjvc@fws.gov)**.

Copies of the draft analysis and proposed rule are available on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>, or by calling 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 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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