

Facts about *Navarretia fossalis* (Spreading navarretia) and Proposed Critical Habitat

What is Navarretia fossalis (Spreading navarretia)?

A member of the phlox family (Polemoniaceae), spreading navarretia is an annual herb that grows between 4 and 6 inches tall. The flowers vary in color from white to lavender white.

Spreading navarretia is primarily found in vernal pool, alkali grasslands, alkali playas and alkali sinks. This plant is found in vernal pool habitats in portions of Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange and San Diego counties, California at elevations between sea level and 4,250 feet.

Why is this plant protected under the Endangered Species Act?

When determining whether a species qualifies for listing under the Endangered Species Act, the Service looks at five separate factors, including: (1) present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; (2) overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (3) disease or predation; (4) the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and (5) other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

Spreading navarretia was listed as endangered under the Act on Oct. 13, 1998, based on factors 1, 4, and 5. Currently, fewer than 45 populations of the plant remain in the United States, most of which are concentrated in Otay Mesa in southern San Diego County, and in portions of Riverside County along the San Jacinto River and near the town of Hemet.

In southern California, it is estimated that more than 90 percent of the historic vernal pools have been destroyed or impacted by a variety of activities, including urban development, off-highway vehicle use, agriculture, and the introduction of non-native species. Primary threats to Spreading navarretia include further loss, fragmentation, and alteration of its vernal pool habitat and the introduction of non-native, competitive plants.

This plant is also listed by the State of California as a threatened species pursuant to the California Endangered Species Act.

Why is the Service proposing critical habitat?

When the Service listed spreading navarretia under the Act, the agency determined that designating critical habitat for the plant was not prudent.

The Center for Biological Diversity and California Native Plant Society filed a lawsuit against the Service in 2001, challenging the Service's failure to designate critical habitat for the plant. As a result of this lawsuit, the Service reviewed its earlier "not prudent" determination and found that there may be some benefit associated with designating critical habitat.

On Oct. 7, 2004, the Service published a proposed rule to designate approximately 4,301 acres of land in Los Angeles and San Diego counties as critical habitat for Spreading navarretia. Areas proposed as critical habitat are mostly on private land, with a portion on Federally managed land.

What are the primary habitat requirements for Spreading navarretia?

When designating critical habitat, the Service must determine – based on the best available scientific information – what physical and biological features (primary constituent elements) are essential to the conservation of a species and may require special management considerations or protection.

Primary constituent elements are those specific habitat components that enable a species to fulfill its life cycle needs.

In the case of Spreading navarretia, primary constituent elements include the following: (1) clay soils that retain water for sufficient periods of time to support vernal pool, alkali grassland, alkali playa, or alkali sink habitat; (2) periods of inundation with water during winter and spring that are sufficient to support vernal pool, alkali grassland, alkali playa, or alkali sink habitats; (3) watershed areas surrounding vernal pools, alkali grasslands, alkali playas, or alkali sinks that provide the hydrology to support these habitats; and (4) vernal pools, alkali grasslands, alkali playas, or alkali sinks at elevations between sea level and 4,250 feet on flat to gently sloping terrain.

All areas proposed as critical habitat are within the historic range of the species and contain one or more of the primary constituent elements.

Are there other areas that are essential to Spreading navarretia conservation?

Yes. The Service has identified about 26,785 acres of land in portions of Riverside and San Diego counties that are essential to the conservation of Spreading navarretia, but which are not being proposed as critical habitat.

The Service excluded these essential lands from proposed critical habitat because they are within the boundaries of approved Habitat Conservation Plans, or HCPs, that provide coverage for the plant, they are covered by Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans that have been determined to provide a conservation benefit to the plant, or they are on Department of Defense property that is used for mission-critical training activities.

Completed HCPs that address the conservation needs of Spreading navarretia include the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, the approved subarea plans for the City and County of San Diego that are part of the Multiple Species Conservation Program, and the Orange County Central-Coastal Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan.

The Service excluded land on Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar from proposed critical habitat pursuant to section 4(a)(3) of the Act, based on the station's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan which provides a conservation benefit to spreading navarretia.

Essential habitat on Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton that is used for mission-critical training activities was also excluded from the proposed critical habitat designation.

What does critical habitat mean for Federal agencies?

All Federal agencies are required to consult with the Service regarding activities they authorize, fund, or permit which may affect a federally listed species or its designated critical habitat.

The purpose of the consultation is to ensure that projects will not jeopardize the continued existence of Spreading navarretia or adversely modify or destroy its designated critical habitat.

How does critical habitat affect private landowners?

The designation of critical habitat does not affect private landowners, unless a project they are proposing uses Federal funds, or requires Federal authorization or permits (e.g., funding from the Federal Highways Administration or a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

If a private landowner does have a Federal nexus then the Federal agency that is responsible for providing the funding or permit would consult with the Service.

How can I comment on the proposed rule?

Comments on the proposed rule can be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92009.

Information and materials may also be sent by facsimile to 760-431-9618, or by electronic mail to fw1cfwo_naf@fws.gov. If you are sending comments by electronic mail, please include "Attn: Spreading Navarretia" in the subject line and include your name and address in the body of the message. Also, please avoid the use of special characters or encryption.

The Service will accept comments on the proposal until 5:00 p.m. on Dec. 6, 2004. Requests for a public hearing must be submitted in writing within 45 days after the opening of the comment period.

Copies of the proposed rule can be requested by calling the Carlsbad Office at 760-431-9440, or by visiting the Carlsbad Office's website at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>.