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Tennessee Purple Coneflower Proposed for Delisting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed removing the Tennessee purple coneflower from the list of threatened and endangered species, marking the success of a decades-long cooperative conservation effort under the Endangered Species Act. The rule was published in today's *Federal Register*, and the public is invited to comment on the proposal for the next 60 days until October 12, 2010.

“More than 30 years of protecting and expanding Tennessee purple coneflower colonies finally brought success to the Service and its conservation partners,” said Cindy Dohner, the Service's Southeast Regional Director. “Thanks to the efforts of many people, adequate regulations exist to protect the plant's populations, and these populations have stabilized to the point that the species has recovered and no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.”

In addition, successful recovery efforts increased the known number and distribution of Tennessee purple coneflower populations range-wide, and provided adequate protection and management to ensure the plant's long-term survival and recovery.

When first listed in 1979, the coneflower was found only in small populations in Davidson, Rutherford, and Wilson counties, each considered a unique population. Tennessee purple coneflower was first collected in 1878, in Rutherford County, by one of Tennessee's earliest botanists, Dr. Augustin Gattinger, and was described in 1898. The species then went unnoticed until it was rediscovered in the late 1960s in Davidson County and in the early 1970s in Wilson County. Currently, this plant exists in limestone barrens and cedar glades of the Central Basin in Davidson, Rutherford, and Wilson counties in Tennessee.

In 1989, the Service published the revised recovery plan for Tennessee purple coneflower which included a criterion for recovering the species to the point that it could be considered for delisting. This criterion requires that the species exist in five secure or protected populations, consisting of at least three colonies each. There are now 19 secure colonies distributed among six populations, five of which contain three or more colonies. These 19 colonies account for approximately 83 percent of the species' distribution.

This recovery success story is the result of conservation efforts by many partners who worked more than 30 years to protect and expand the Tennessee purple coneflower colonies. The Service's partners include the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation and Tennessee Division of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service and various private landowners.

Many factors influenced the recovery, including discovering new colonies through surveys of suitable habitat; researching the life history, genetics, and ecology of the species; and establishing new colonies from seed or nursery propagated plants.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation was instrumental in recovering the Tennessee purple coneflower by buying or securing sites through other means to protect the species, as well as building fences to protect colonies from outdoor recreational vehicle damage, removing competing vegetation, and using fire with prescribed burns at many sites to provide habitat conditions that help this species thrive.

Tennessee purple coneflower is a member of the sunflower family in the genus *Echinacea*, which includes several purple coneflower species that are commercially marketed for ornamental and medicinal purposes. The Tennessee purple coneflower can be found commercially for landscaping purposes, but most often these plants are hybrids.

If Tennessee purple coneflower is removed from the list of threatened and endangered species, federal agencies will no longer need to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of this species. The Service will work with Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to implement a post-delisting monitoring plan for at least five years if the species is delisted.

To ensure that the final decision resulting from this proposal should be as accurate and effective as possible, the Service is soliciting comments and information from the public, other governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, and any other interested parties.

The Service particularly seeks comments relating to the biological information about this species, relevant data pertaining to threats, especially relating to current or planned activities near Tennessee purple coneflower habitat, and the draft post-delisting monitoring plan.

The proposal and a draft post-delisting monitoring plan were published in today's *Federal Register*. Written comments regarding the proposed rule and draft post-delisting monitoring plan must be received by October 12, 2010. All comments will be considered before a final determination is made. Comments should be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket Number FWS–R4–ES–2010–0059, Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The proposed rule is on the Cookeville Ecological Services Field Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/cookeville/>. Copies of the proposed rule and draft post-delisting monitoring

plan are also available by contacting Geoff Call, Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501 (telephone 931/528-6481, extension 213; facsimile 931/528-7075).

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information, visit <http://www.fws.gov> or <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>.

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