



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW (Time 6:49)

**VANDENBURG MONKEYFLOWER (HOST SARAH LEON WITH CONNIE
RUTHERFORD)**

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there. This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I'm on the phone today with Connie Rutherford, the Listing and Recovery Coordinator for Plants at the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office. Hi, Connie, how are you today?

MS. RUTHERFORD: Hi. I'm doing great, thank you.

MS. LEON: Alright, now Connie we've got some new candidates for protection under the Endangered Species Act. One of them is a plant with a certainly interesting name. Can you tell us a little about the Vandenberg monkeyflower?

MS. RUTHERFORD: Yes, the Latin name for this plant is really a mouthful—*Mimulus fremontii* var. *vandenbergensis*. Hence the common name Vandenberg monkeyflower. It's a small, little annual flower that comes up in the spring when there have been good winter rains. It only grows to be about 4-6 inches high usually, and is bright yellow in color. In a good spring it will produce carpets of little yellow monkeyflowers on the sandy soils, and it is quite a sight to behold when it has a good year.

MS. LEON: So like I said earlier, this is now a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Can you tell our listeners what this means?

MS. RUTHERFORD: Yes, there's two ways that a species can become a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. One is through the external process, which is being petitioned from third parties. The other way is our internal process, and in this case, this is what we've done here. We've evaluated the status of this plant and we

have determined that it meets the qualifications to be a candidate for listing. Basically if we are saying that a species is a candidate than it does meet the definition of a threatened or endangered species.

MS. LEON: Okay, so what are the major threats to the species?

MS. RUTHERFORD: It's found only in Western Santa Barbara county in California, and its current distribution is a fairly small area—only about 7 miles long and about 2 miles wide in an area of kind of a special habitat we call Burton Mesa Chaparral, and it's characterized by its sandy soils.

We don't think that the species was much more widely distributed in the past than it is now, although we do know that there have been a few losses of populations. Some of the reasons for decline have to do with destruction and fragmentation of habitat by humans. Just within the past few years one of the largest populations of this plant was destroyed by a proposed housing development. Ironically, the site was graded in anticipation for being built out for a new housing development. Then because of the downturn of the economy, the housing development was not built out. So now, unfortunately, non-native species have moved into the area and the vacant lots have now become a seed source for these non-native species which are then spreading to adjacent areas.

So, direct destruction is a threat. Fragmentation of habitat—there have been humans in the area for many years and so not only development but agriculture has converted some of the habitat. And then these intrusions by humans has set the stage for the invasion by non-native species. Veldt grass, which is a native of South Africa has become particularly prevalent in this Burton Mesa area, and is spreading very rapidly and is very difficult to get rid of it once it gets a toehold.

The other thing that happens also with human occupation is that the frequency of fires in the area is altered. And with increasing fire frequency, this tends to favor the non-native species, and therefore we get even more of the Veldt grass moving into the area. So although the original vegetation was adapted to fire, because of the increase in fire frequency and because of the presence now of the non-native species, this kind of upsets the previous balance that we had in that plant community. So now we are favoring the continued spread of non-natives in this habitat.

MS. LEON: Would you tell us what's being done now to help improve this species' status?

MS. RUTHERFORD: We're working with a couple of our partners. There are two state agencies that have the species on their lands. One is a state park—La Purísima State Park. The other state agency is the California Department of Fish and Game. They actually have a reserve called the Burton Mesa Reserve. And so there are populations of this plant on both of these properties. We are working with both of those agencies to identify where exactly the species occurs on their properties and what the extent of what

the threats are, particularly with respect to the non-native species as well as any other threats that may exist there. And we're also trying to seek funding to help those agencies with non-native removal so that we can try to keep the Veldt grass and other non-native species at least under control.

Another partner is Vandenberg Air Force Base. They do have populations on their properties and some projects that are proposed for their properties. There's also ongoing maintenance of oil and gas pipelines. They are in contact with us frequently about their projects, and so they are also doing surveys to evaluate what impacts there may be from those projects on the species.

One other partner I did want to mention, although they don't have any of the populations of their land, is the Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens. They are one of our partners through the Center for Plant Conservation, and they have been very instrumental in helping out with surveys and accumulating historical information about the species. So I wanted to recognize them for their efforts.

MS. LEON: Thank you so much, Connie, for taking the time out of your day to tell us a little more about this unique plant. It was a real pleasure having you on.

MS. RUTHERFORD: Thank you.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.