



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

**TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (5:30)**

**JESUP'S MILK-VETCH (HOST – MS. LEON WITH SUSI VON OETTINGEN)**

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 Susi Von Oettingen, Endangered Species Biologist at the New England field office in Concord, New Hampshire. Hi, Susi, how are you today?

MS. VON OETTINGEN: I'm fine, thanks.

MS. LEON: Susi, let's talk about Jesup's milk-vetch. What can you tell us about this species?

MS. VON OETTINGEN: Jesup's milk-vetch is in the pea family, so the family of plants it belongs to is quite common. However, it's a very rare member of the pea family. It's only found in three places in the world. Two little sites in New Hampshire and one in Vermont and has only ever been found in a total of five places historically. It's an endemic species to New England. It grows along the banks of the Connecticut River on rock ledges. Basically, either in the cracks or right at the top of the rocky ledges. It doesn't compete well with other plants, so that's why it kind of has been able to exist in what we would consider a very hostile environment. Other plants generally cannot compete with it.

It is considered to be an annual or biannual. It doesn't live very long basically. It produces a lot of seeds, but the seedlings don't survive in high numbers in the environment in which it grows. We did have an interesting story where a botanist actually took some of the seeds home and threw them in her vegetable garden and the plant took over. It was great. As long as you weeded around it, it was able to do quite

well, so it could do well elsewhere, but it just doesn't compete. That is one of the reasons it is so rare is because other plants are now invading its habitat.

The primary threat is through invasive plant species. Those include plants as common as poison ivy, which makes this a challenging plant for some to study, like me, if you're allergic to poison ivy. As well as black swallowwort, which is an invasive plant, highly invasive. That's the milkweed family and it produces tons of seeds and it's one we can't get rid of very easily. And some other non-native plants that have invaded the habitat of the Jesup's milk-vetch and are now threatening to overrun it basically.

MS. LEON: So can you tell us about some of the conservation actions that are currently under way?

MS. VON OETTINGEN: The Fish and Wildlife Service in concert with the state agencies have been working hard at trying to figure out if, first of all, there are other sites, other populations, on the Connecticut River. We really have been restricting ourselves to looking on the banks of the Connecticut River in New Hampshire and Vermont because the plant was never found outside of those two states. Now we're looking to find a habitat that we can introduce it to. And if you can picture blackish, gray, granite outcrops with the water just crashing below and maybe some shaded trees up above and soiled patches here and there, that's what we're looking for and hoping to transplant seeds.

What we're also working on is perfecting an irrigation system, of all things, that we would put out at this new site in the event that we have drought. The effects of climate change may also be something that we will be looking at very closely in the future. What we've found is that we are starting to get these wild weather swings and that includes floods at June and July where the river is over its banks, and basically scouring the habitat where the plant grows, at the wrong time of year.

MS. LEON: Susi, why would you say the public should care about this particular species recovery? We've all ready gone over that it's in just a couple of unique locations, so it's out of sight. Is it out of mind or should it be?

MS. VON OETTINGEN: Right. The plant has always been rare. I mean, we certainly don't know what it was like pre-colonial times, but it is a rare plant and it's unique to the Connecticut River. I think for the community that lives in the Connecticut River water shed, it's an important component of the story of the river. It is a plant that may tell us what the effects of climate change will be to the communities that live along riverbanks. For example, if this plant cannot survive the weather swings, the wild water level fluctuations, it will be the first to go, but it will be an indication that other species may be following in its path. Those could be species that would be under the water or maybe a little further up the riverbanks that we haven't observed yet as declining and it may be too late to finally figure that out.

I look at this species because it's rare and it's very sensitive to changes in the environment as an indicator species. Certainly, this plant is feeling the effects of invasive species and feeling the effects of human's impact on natural environment. I think that it's important to watch species very closely and Jesup's milk-vetch is one of the more sensitive ones that we are keeping an eye on and it should be telling us that there may be more dire things down the road.

MS. LEON: I wanted to thank you, Susi, for taking the time today to share this plant story with us.

MS. VON OETTINGEN: Well, you're very welcome and thanks for your interest. Not too many people know about this plant, so hopefully more will.

MS. LEON: Right. That's what we're hoping for.

MS. VON OETTINGEN: Great.

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