

## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 28, 2014

**Note: Correction: The whorled sunflower is found in Floyd County, Georgia and Cherokee County, Alabama, NOT Floyd County, Alabama, and Cherokee County, Georgia, as stated in the press release sent yesterday afternoon, May 28.**

For more information: <http://www.fws.gov/news/ShowNews.cfm?ID=43DFBC85-DDAA-48AF-E7A5829F4F29C9A6>

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## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Estimates Economic Impact of Critical Habitat Designations for Three Southern Plants**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks additional public comment on proposed critical habitat for three plants found in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. About 2,488 acres on 30 parcels have been identified as habitat critical to the plants' survival.

In addition, the Service seeks comment on a draft economic analysis that considers the cost of the critical habitat designation to federal, state and local governments. The estimated costs of the designation range from \$410 to \$21,000 per year, and is expected to be borne largely in administrative costs by federal and state agencies.

The deadline for public comment on the proposed critical habitat and draft economic analysis is June 30, 2014.

These actions are a result of the Service's proposal in August 2013 to list the three plants as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The plants are the Short's bladderpod, the whorled sunflower, and the fleshy-fruit gladeceess. A final listing decision is pending. The proposed designation of critical habitat for these three plants and the associated draft economic analysis are part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan aimed at addressing a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA listing program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce a litigation-driven workload.

The plants are very rare. The fleshy-fruit gladeceess is found in only two counties in Alabama; the whorled sunflower is found in four counties in Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee; and the Short's bladderpod is found in 11 counties in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. Since 1992, twenty-seven percent of the known Short's bladderpod population has been lost.

The plants face multiple threats to their survival including road maintenance and construction; development; industrial, forestry and agricultural practices; water-level fluctuations in reservoirs; off-road vehicle use; and competition from native and invasive non-native plants. In addition, many of the plant populations are small, making them less resilient to threats and vulnerable to loss of genetic variation.

All of the proposed critical habitat tracts are occupied by one of the three plant species. Short's bladderpod is found in Indiana (Posey County); Kentucky (Clark, Franklin, and Woodford Counties), and Tennessee (Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Jackson, Montgomery, Smith, and Trousdale Counties). The whorled sunflower is found in Floyd County, Georgia, Cherokee County, Alabama, and Madison and McNairy Counties, Tennessee. The fleshy-fruit gladeceess is found in Lawrence and Morgan Counties, Alabama. About 86 percent of the proposed critical habitat is on private land. The remainder is land owned by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and state and local governments.

The purpose of critical habitat is to identify specific geographic areas that are essential to conserving a federally protected plant or animal. It serves as a general guideline to help ensure that federal agencies and the public are aware of the needs of the species, or the three plants in this case. Although private, local and state government lands are included in the proposed critical habitat for these plants, the designation should not affect activities on these properties. Those landowners would only be affected if they seek federal funding or require federal permits for land-use activities on their property. In such cases, the lead federal agency will need to consult with the Service to ensure their actions do not jeopardize the plants or adversely modify their critical habitat. It is important to note that critical habitat does not affect land ownership, nor does it grant government or public access to private lands.

The economic analysis estimates the cost of consultations with the Service when a federal agency does work in an area designated as critical habitat, or funds or permits work done by others. Local governments and businesses may incur costs for work involving federal funding or a federal permit. The estimate does not include any costs incurred as a result of the listing.

The benefit of designating critical habitat for a listed plant or animal is that it informs government agencies, landowners, and the public of the specific areas that are important to the conservation of the species. Identifying this habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. The Service's identification of critical habitat areas is based on the best scientific information available, and considers all relevant information provided by the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry and other interested parties during the public comment period. The Service offers willing landowners a number of voluntary and non-regulatory conservation programs to help these plants survive as they live and work on their lands.

This is the second comment period for the proposed critical habitat designation for the three plants. The Service first released the proposal for public comment on August 2, 2013. The plants have been candidates for listing since 1999.

To submit written comments on the draft economic analysis and/or proposed critical habitat designation for these three plants go to <http://www.regulations.gov>, and enter docket number

FWS-R4-ES-2013-0086. For more information on how to comment on the proposed critical habitat and the economic analysis, please visit [www.fws.gov/cookeville/](http://www.fws.gov/cookeville/)

Landowners interested in helping the Service recover the Short's bladderpod and the whorled sunflower, or seeking more information about the potential implications of the listing and critical habitat designation, should contact Geoff Call in the Service's Tennessee Field Office at 931-525-4983, or via e-mail at [Geoff\\_Call@fws.gov](mailto:Geoff_Call@fws.gov). For fleshy fruit gladeceess, please contact Shannon Holbrook in the Service's Alabama Field Office at 251-441-5871, or via email at [Shannon\\_Holbrook@fws.gov](mailto:Shannon_Holbrook@fws.gov).

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