

# News Release



Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office  
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<http://www.fws.gov/idaho>

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes Critical Habitat for Rare Idaho Plant**

*Comments accepted until July 11, 2011*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today a proposal to designate critical habitat for slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), a rare Idaho plant protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants and to date has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation, as well as promoting the recovery of many others.

Slickspot peppergrass was listed as a threatened species on October 8, 2009. It is unique to southwest Idaho, found only in parts of the Snake River Plain, the Boise Foothills and the Owyhee Plateau.

The Service is proposing to designate 57,756 acres as critical habitat for the plant's protection in Idaho's Ada, Elmore, Owyhee and Payette Counties. Military lands with approved conservation plans, known as Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans (INRMPs), that provide a benefit to the species are exempted from designated critical habitat under 4(a)(3) of the ESA and are not included in this proposal.

"This proposed designation of critical habitat for slickspot peppergrass is the result of a careful, comprehensive assessment of the best scientific information available, including that found in the final listing determination," said Brian Kelly, Idaho State Supervisor for the Service. "We commend the significant efforts our conservation partners are undertaking in Idaho on behalf of this species and its habitat. This proposed habitat designation,

when final, will provide additional habitat protection and complement this work to ensure the survival and recovery of this plant.”

The Service is soliciting public review and comment, including the submission of new scientific or commercial information during the public comment period. In particular, the Service is seeking comments on the proposed designation; specific information regarding the plant and geographic areas providing physical or biological features essential for its conservation; land use designations and impacts to the proposed critical habitat by current or planned activities; economic, national security or other impacts; possible benefits to excluding particular areas of the proposed designation, such as private lands; climate change impacts; and suggestions to accommodate public concerns and comments.

The agency will consider comments received or postmarked on or before July 11, 2011.

The proposal, developed by a team of federal scientists, is intended to provide sufficient habitat to allow for genetic and life-history diversity, ensure the continued distribution rangewide in Idaho across sagebrush-steppe habitat, ensure sufficient connectivity among populations, and allow for the ability to address threats facing the species such as wildfire, invasion of nonnative plants, residential and agricultural development, potential inappropriate livestock use, such as trampling; and emerging threats such as harvester ants, which eat the plant’s seeds.

Under the ESA, critical habitat identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a listed species. Critical habitat receives protection under section 7 of the ESA by requiring federal agencies to consult with the Service on federal actions that may affect critical habitat and by prohibiting federal agencies from carrying out, funding, or authorizing the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Only actions that have some “federal nexus” are subject to consultation on critical habitat; activities undertaken by private landowners that do not involve any federal funding, permits, or other activities are not affected by a critical habitat designation.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to non-federal lands. A critical habitat designation does not impose restrictions on non-federal lands unless federal funds, permits or

activities are involved. However, designating critical habitat on federal or non-federal lands informs landowners and the public of the specific areas that are important to the conservation of the species.

Slickspot peppergrass is a member of the mustard family and it has numerous tiny white flowers resembling the garden flower sweet alyssum. The plant occurs primarily in unique soil conditions known as slickspots that are dispersed within a semiarid sagebrush-steppe habitat.

Approximately 95 percent of the proposed critical habitat designation is on public lands: federal (86 percent), state (8 percent), and county lands (1 percent). The remaining 5 percent is on private lands.

Written comments and information concerning this proposal can be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments to Docket No. [FWS-R1-ES-2010-0071].
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: [FWS-R1-ES-2010-0071]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM; Arlington, VA 22203.

Comments must be received within 60 days, on or before July 11, 2011. Please note that if you are using the Federal eRulemaking Portal, the deadline for submitting an electronic comment is Eastern Standard Time on this date. The Service will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process. The Service is not able to accept email or faxes. Requests for public hearings must be submitted within 45 days to the Service, in writing, at the address shown below by June 24, 2011.

For additional information, contact Susan Burch, Supervising Biologist, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709; by telephone at 208-378-5265; or by facsimile at 208-378-5262. Comments and materials received, as well as supporting documentation used in the preparation of this rule, are available for public inspection by appointment during normal business hours.

A copy of the proposed rule, maps and other information about slickspot peppergrass is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/idaho>.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. We're working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered>.

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. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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