



Questions and Answers about the Proposal to Remove Running Buffalo Clover from the List of Endangered Species

1. What action is the Service taking with the running buffalo clover?

The Service is proposing to remove Endangered Species Act protection for the running buffalo clover. The proposed rule to delist the running buffalo clover published in the *Federal Register* on August 27, 2019. Before making a final decision on the delisting proposal, the Service must gather and analyze public comments and any new information. Publication of the proposed rule opens a 60-day public comment period, which closes on October 28, 2019.

2. What is the running buffalo clover?

Running buffalo clover is a perennial plant with leaves divided into three leaflets. The species is native to Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. It has been extirpated from Arkansas, Illinois and Kansas.

It is called *running* buffalo clover because it produces *runners* (i.e., stolons) that extend from the base of stems and run along the surface of the ground.

Running buffalo clover grows best in areas with periodic disturbance and a somewhat open habitat, but it cannot tolerate full-sun, full-shade or severe disturbance. Historically it was found in rich soils in the transition areas between open forest and prairie, which were probably maintained by the disturbance caused by bison. Today, the clover can be found in partially shaded woodlots, mowed areas (lawns, parks, cemeteries) and along streams and trails.

3. Why was the running buffalo clover listed as endangered?

There were very few reports throughout the clover's range from 1910 to 1983. Before 1983, the last specimen was collected in 1940, leading botanists to suspect it was extinct. But in 1983 it was rediscovered in West Virginia. This was still the only population known to exist at the time that it was listed in 1987. Thanks to new surveys spurred by the ESA listing, several additional populations were soon found in Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia. Eventually, populations were discovered in Missouri in 1994, and a single population was discovered in Pennsylvania in 2017.

4. What caused the running buffalo clover population decline?

Running buffalo clover likely depended to some extent on bison for soil enrichment, periodic intense disturbance and seed dispersal. The West Virginia population, the only known population at the time of listing, was in the immediate vicinity of the last recorded site for bison in the state. All other West Virginia records were near known bison trails.

Other factors contributing the clover's losses and declines throughout its range include habitat loss due to clearing for pasture and farming and, competition from introduced non-native plants such as common white clover.

The clover relies on periodic disturbances to set back succession and open the tree canopy to allow for partial to filtered sunlight, which the plant requires. The clover gradually dies out at sites where there is no disturbance and an area is overgrown with shrubs and trees. A complete loss of forest canopy, however, can also cause running buffalo clover to die out at a site by allowing too much sunlight.

5. Why is the Service proposing to delist running buffalo clover?

The number of known running buffalo clover populations has increased from one to 154 across six states. Surveyors continue to find new populations and the known range has expanded to include Pennsylvania. Conservation partners have implemented habitat management that benefits running buffalo clover, which has shown to be effective. Most managed populations occur on publicly owned lands or lands dedicated for conservation, so we expect management of these populations to continue into the foreseeable future. At many sites that are not managed for running buffalo clover, the plant has persisted over the years and populations exhibit a high level of resiliency.

6. How was running buffalo successfully recovered?

Many partners have helped manage and conserve running buffalo clover populations. More surveys led to the discovery of populations at new sites. The discovery of new populations led to management and protection, where appropriate, to ensure that running buffalo clover persists on those sites. Of the 154 known occurrences of running buffalo clover, 83 are on public lands or privately owned lands with conservation agreements. It is the Service's determination that the 23 populations currently under management in conjunction with the 60 other populations on publicly owned lands are sufficient to maintain the species' viability now and into the foreseeable future.

7. Will the running buffalo clover population status still be monitored if it is delisted?

Yes, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service, in cooperation with states, to monitor a species for a minimum of five years after delisting to ensure that it remains stable. The Service is also issuing a draft post-delisting monitoring plan for public and peer review and comment.

8. How can I comment on the proposed rule or provide additional information about the running buffalo clover?

You may submit comments or additional information by one of the following methods. The deadline is October 28, 2019.

1) Electronically:

Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–R3–ES–2018–0036, which is the docket number for this rulemaking. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen, under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link to locate this document. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) By hard copy:

Submit by U.S. mail or hand-delivery to:

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS–R3–ES–2018–0036
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Headquarters
MS: BPHC
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

We request that you send comments only by the methods described above. We will post all comments on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that we will post any personal information you provide us.

9. How can I learn more about running buffalo clover and the proposed rule to delist?

The proposed rule to delist running buffalo clover and supporting documents are available on <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the Search box, enter FWS–R3–ES–2018–0036, which is the docket number for this rulemaking.

Additional information is online at www.fws.gov/midwest/angered/plants or you may contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Ohio Field Office at:

Ohio Ecological Services Field Office
4625 Morse Road, Suite 104
Columbus, Ohio 43230
Telephone 614–416–8993

If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), please call the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.