

NEWS RELEASE

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Service Designates Critical Habitat for the Colorado Butterfly Plant in Platte and Laramie Counties, Wyoming

In accordance with a court-approved settlement agreement, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated 3,538 acres of critical habitat along approximately 51 stream miles within Platte and Laramie counties, Wyoming for the Federally threatened Colorado butterfly plant, a short-lived perennial herb.

Private lands comprise 90 percent of the designated critical habitat with state lands comprising the remaining 10 percent. The designated areas are adjacent to Tepee Ring Creek, Bear Creek, Little Bear Creek, Horse Creek, Lodgepole Creek, Diamond Creek, and Lone Tree Creek, Wyoming.

In this final action, the Service excluded 4,948 acres from the 8,486 acres that were proposed as critical habitat.

Some areas in Wyoming were excluded because the Service and private landowners developed conservation agreements that will provide conservation benefits for the plant. Similarly, habitat in Weld County, Colorado was excluded because the City of Fort Collins signed a conservation agreement with the Service.

“We appreciate the efforts and willingness of private landowners to partner with the Service to seek solutions that are compatible with the conservation of the plant as well as landowner activities,” said Ralph Morgenweck, the Service’s Director for the Mountain-Prairie Region. “It is volunteer partnerships such as these that will provide for the long-term persistence of this species.”

Habitat located on the F.E. Warren Air Force Base was not considered for designation as critical habitat because the Base has an approved Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan that addresses the conservation needs of the species.

Proposed areas in Kimball County, Nebraska were excluded based on 2004 survey results showing no remaining populations and habitat that did not include all the biological elements necessary for the conservation of the plant.

The critical habitat designation was completed in response to a lawsuit filed by the Center for

Biological Diversity and the Biodiversity Legal Foundation.

The Colorado butterfly plant is found in moist areas of floodplains and stands 2 to 3 feet tall with one or a few reddish, fuzzy stems and white flowers that turn pink or red with age. Only a few flowers are open at one time and these are located below the rounded buds and above the mature fruits. Non-flowering plants consist of a stemless, basal rosette of oblong, hairless leaves 1 to 7 inches long.

The primary threats to the plant are haying and mowing at certain times of the year, overgrazing, changes in water use, land conversion for cultivation, competition from exotic plants, non-selective use of herbicides, and loss of habitat to urban development.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic, and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects, and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia, and malaria, and to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations. 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 private lands. Designation of critical habitat does not affect private landowners undertaking a project on private land that does not involve federal funding or require a federal permit or authorization.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

This finding is published in today's Federal Register. Other informational materials can be found at <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/plants/cobutterfly/index.htm>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which

encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.