

NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

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Mary Jennings (WY) 307-772-2374 x32

Lee Carlson (CO) 303-275-2370

Sharon Rose (CO) 303-236-7905 x 415

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES TO LIST COLORADO BUTTERFLY PLANT AS THREATENED

In the March 24, 1998, editor of the **Federal Register** the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing the Colorado butterfly plant be included as a threatened species on the Federal list of endangered and threatened species. Additional information, comments, and suggestions regarding this proposal should be postmarked and sent to the Service's Cheyenne office no later than May 26, 1998.

The Colorado butterfly plant is a short-lived perennial herb found in moist areas of floodplains within a small area in southeastern Wyoming, western Nebraska, and north-central Colorado. It stands 2-3 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 1-7 inches long.

The Colorado butterfly plant is currently known from 22 populations with a total of less than 26,000 individuals. Only four of the populations are large enough to be considered secured at this time. **Most populations are found on private land.** Indiscriminate herbicide spraying, haying and mowing at certain times of year, some water development, land conversion for cultivation, competition from exotic plants, and loss of habitat to urban growth are the main threats to the plant. The low numbers and limited distribution of this herbaceous plant contribute to its vulnerability to natural and human-caused disturbances and environmental stresses. Further reduction in the number of plants could affect its reproductive capability and the genetic diversity of the species.

Two populations of the Colorado butterfly plant occur on F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming. In 1990, a research natural area was established to include all the known, naturally-occurring populations on the base. Additionally, various agreements have been implemented to provide protection to the plant on the base and it is the intent of the Service to meet with private landowners and develop further agreements.

The Endangered Species Act directs Federal agencies to protect and promote the recovery of listed species. Collection of listed plants on Federal lands is unlawful. In addition, proposed

Federal projects and actions require review to ensure they will not jeopardize the survival of the species. For private and non-Federal landowners, consultations come into play only in cases where activities involving listed species require Federal funding or permitting. The endangered Species Act does not prohibit "take" of listed plants on private lands, but landowners must comply with State laws protecting imperiled plants.

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 treatments for cancer, juvenile leukemia, heart disease and malaria, and medicines to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also being used to develop natural pesticides.

Comments and additional information regarding this proposal should be mailed to the Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4000 Morrie Avenue, Cheyenne, Wyoming 80221.