

## NEWS RELEASE

### U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain-Prairie Region

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### CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR TWO ENDANGERED PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a final rule designating approximately 6,289 acres as critical habitat for the Holmgren milk-vetch in Mohave County, Arizona and Washington County, Utah; and approximately 2,151 acres as critical habitat for the Shivwits milk-vetch in Washington County, Utah.

Critical habitat is a term defined in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection.

In developing the final critical habitat designation for the Holmgren milk-vetch (*Astragalus holmgreniorum*) and the Shivwits milk-vetch (*A. ampullarioides*), the Service reviewed the comments received on our proposed rule and draft economic analysis and conducted further evaluation of lands included in the proposal. We also reviewed the overall approach to conservation of both milk-vetches by local, State, and Federal agencies since the plants were listed and their recovery plan developed.

Based on this review, the Service is designating three units with five subunits as critical habitat for the Holmgren milk-vetch:

Unit 1-Utah-Arizona Border: This unit consists of approximately 5,546 acres divided into three subunits:

- State Line: located east and west of I-15 as this highway crosses the State line of Arizona and Utah, and is bounded by the Atkinville Wash and Virgin River to the north. This unit consists of 3,836 acres. Nine percent of the land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Arizona, 44 percent is managed by BLM in Utah, 23 percent is managed by Arizona State Land Department, 19 percent is managed by the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration and 5 percent is in private ownership.
- Gardner Well: located in Arizona, south of the Arizona-Utah State border, 2 miles east of I-15. This unit consists of 564 acres of habitat managed entirely by the Arizona State Land Department.
- Central Valley: located north of the Arizona-Utah State border, west of a geological feature

called White Dome, and east of I-15. This unit consists of 1,146 acres entirely managed by the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration.

Unit 2 – Santa Clara Unit: This unit comprises approximately 567 acres of habitat divided into two subunits:

- Stucki Spring: located in Utah west of Box Canyon, in an area before Box Canyon Wash narrows, and near Stucki Spring. This subunit consists of 438 acres of habitat managed by BLM-Utah.
- South Hills: located south of Santa Clara, Utah, this unit consists of approximately 129 acres with 97 percent managed by BLM-Utah and 3 percent in private ownership.

Unit 3 - Purgatory Flat: located near Purgatory Flat to the south of Harrisburg Junction, Utah, consists of approximately 176 acres with 68 percent managed by BLM-Utah and 32 percent under private or county ownership.

The following 4 units of land are being designated as critical habitat for the Shivwits milk-vetch:

Unit 1 - The Pahcoon Spring Wash located on approximately 134 acres of BLM lands in Utah adjacent to the Shivwits Indian Reservation.

Unit 3 - Coral Canyon consisting of approximately 87 acres adjacent to a golf course near Harrisburg Junction, Utah. Eighty-seven percent of this habitat is owned by the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration, 12 percent is managed by BLM-Utah, and 1 percent is in private ownership.

Unit 4 - Harrisburg Junction consists of two subunits to the north of Harrisburg Junction encompassing 759 acres.

- The Harrisburg Bench and Cottonwood subunit, near Cottonwood Creek and Harrisburg Bench, consists of 297 acres of which 88 percent of managed by BLM-Utah and 12 percent in private ownership.
- The Silver Reef subunit, adjacent to the Red Cliffs Desert Tortoise Reserve, consists of approximately 462 acres with 90 percent managed by BLM-Utah and 10 percent in private ownership.

Unit 5 - Zion Unit consisting of 1,201 acres occurring entirely on lands managed by Zion National Park.

Based on current knowledge of the life history, biology and ecology of the two milk-vetches, the Service considered lands for critical habitat designation that contained soft clay soil with moderate slopes that often have water flow pathways from seasonal precipitation. The habitats ensure protection of seed banks, seed dispersal and the presence of insect pollinators to promote gene flow. All designated habitats are occupied by the plants and contain the necessary geographic and biological functions essential for the conservation of the species.

Not included in the designation of critical habitat for the Shivwits milk-vetch are 240 acres of lands of

the Shivwits Band of Paiutes Tribe located in the vicinity of Ivins, Utah. The Service worked with the Tribe to create a sound management plan that will provide greater protection of the lands than what would be achieved through a critical habitat designation. Based on government-to-government relations with Native American tribal governments, the Service also believes that fish, wildlife, and other natural resources on tribal lands are better managed under tribal programs than through federal regulation wherever possible and practicable.

A copy of the final rule, economic analysis, and other information about the Holmgren and Shivwits milk-vetches can be found on the Service's web site at:

<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/species/plants/milkvetch/index.htm>

Both the Shivwits milk-vetch and the Holmgren milk-vetch are members of the pea family. The Shivwits milk-vetch, often associated with purple hued patch of soft clay soil, is found only in southern Washington County, Utah, and numbers less than 4,200 plants. The Holmgren milk-vetch is most frequently found on the skirt edges of hill and plateau formations, slightly above or on the edge of drainage areas in both Washington County, Utah, and Mohave County, Arizona. In most years, the population consists of approximately 500 to 10,000 plants. Both species grow on State and private land, as well as land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Rapid urban expansion and population growth in the plants' habitat, which includes construction of new roads, power lines and other development and the spread of noxious weeds, has caused both plants to decline rapidly.

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.