

News Bulletin

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Rare Oregon Silverspot Butterfly Is Returning Home to Northwest Oregon

With State's help, releases planned for two sites on the coast

PORTLAND, OR –The Oregon silverspot butterfly makes its home in a tiny handful of coastal prairies in Oregon and northern California. Soon, the butterfly will find two new sites to call home. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners are in the final stages of planning to re-establish two populations of the threatened Oregon silverspot butterfly within their historical range along the Oregon coast. If successful, the reintroductions would increase the number of populations from five to seven with the ultimate recovery goal of ten self-sustaining populations.

Butterflies will be reintroduced at Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge in southern Tillamook County and the Saddle Mountain State Natural Area in central Clatsop County. Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge has been actively restoring habitat for silverspots in preparation for their return. Saddle Mountain State Natural Area, owned and managed by Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department, has the plentiful nectar and violet plants that the butterflies prefer. The first releases are slated to begin this summer at Nestucca National Wildlife Refuge. Releases for the Saddle Mountain State Natural Area will start in the summer of 2018.

The Service is reintroducing these butterflies under a special experimental population provision of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that provides surrounding landowners with assurances they will not be submitted to economic or regulatory restrictions on their properties. The 10(j) rule, as it is officially known, provides broad flexibility and regulatory relief for activities such as development, timber harvest and agriculture.

“This project began seven years ago and now we’ll finally be able to witness the fruits of our labor when butterfly larvae are released into their restored habitat,” said Robyn Thorson, Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Two additional populations of Oregon silverspot will contribute greatly toward meeting the butterfly’s recovery goals.”

At one time, the Oregon silverspot butterfly was widespread among 20 distinct locations from northern California to southern Washington. Only five populations currently remain, four in Oregon and one in California. The species gained ESA protections in 1980 when it was listed as threatened. More recently,

concern for the species has increased due to dramatic declines observed in 2014 and 2015 at all four existing Oregon sites. The Service is working with our partners at the Oregon Zoo and Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, and the U.S. Forest Service to reverse this trend, including this effort to reintroduce new populations.

The Oregon Zoo and Woodland Park Zoo are providing Oregon silverspot pupae for the reintroductions through their [impaired species recovery programs](#). Each year, a small number of female butterflies are collected from the largest population in the wild and brought to zoo conservation labs, where they lay large numbers of eggs. The eggs hatch into tiny larvae, which are kept safe over the winter with an adequate food supply and protection from predators and released the following year to augment wild silverspot populations. These programs substantially increase the number of offspring surviving to adulthood.

The primary limiting factor for the Oregon silverspot is lack of its caterpillar host plant, the early blue violet. The butterfly needs high densities of these violets surrounded by other native nectar plants. The coastal prairie habitat where the butterflies live was historically maintained by regular natural disturbances such as fire, but now these events rarely occur. Controlled fire and activities that simulate natural conditions, like vegetation removal, must now be undertaken to sustain native coastal prairie habitat and keep invasive woody species at bay.

The Service's National Wildlife Refuge System plays an essential role in helping protect and conserve our nation's most at risk species, including recent local conservation successes with the greater sage-grouse, Columbian white-tailed deer, and Oregon chub.

The proposed rule, published December 23, 2016, opened a 60-day comment period. All substantive comments received are addressed in the final rule which will publish in the *Federal Register* on June 23, 2017. A link to the final rule can be found at: www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/.

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