

# News Release



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## Critical Habitat Designated for Two Endangered Oregon Plants

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated 9,930 acres of land in southwestern Oregon as critical habitat for large-flowered woolly meadowfoam and Cook’s desert parsley, also known as Cook’s lomatium. Both species are federally listed as endangered and native to relatively undisturbed vernal pool-mounded prairie habitats.

Large-flowered woolly meadowfoam occurs only in the Agate Desert region of the Middle Rogue River Valley near Medford in Jackson County. Cook’s desert parsley also occurs in that area, as well as in wet meadows, sloped mixed-conifer openings, and shrubby plant communities in the Illinois River Valley in Josephine County.

The critical habitat designation includes 4,006 acres in Josephine County and 5,923 acres in Jackson County and consists of 24 separate units in various locations. About 6,897 acres, or 69 percent, of the total designation is private land; the rest is federal, state, county, or municipal ownership. More than half of the total—about 4,853 acres in Jackson County—has been designated critical habitat for the vernal pool fairy shrimp since 2003.

“The endangered woolly meadowfoam and Cook’s desert parsley are found nowhere else in the world but southwestern Oregon’s rare vernal pool ecosystems,” said Paul Henson, state supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office. “Identifying areas essential to their survival is an important step in the recovery process.”

Vernal pools—shallow depressions amidst mostly arid landscapes that contain water seasonally—make up rare and fragile ecosystems, sensitive to changes in hydrology and ground disturbance. The most serious threats to the continued existence of large-flowered woolly meadowfoam and Cook’s desert parsley are residential and agricultural development, encroachment by invasive non-native plants, and mining. Other threats include ground disturbance by off-road vehicles, habitat fragmentation, garbage dumping, certain grazing practices, and herbivory by voles.

Selection of the critical habitat units was informed by the priority recovery areas identified in the draft recovery plan for the two plants published in 2006, along with ground survey information, updated aerial imagery analysis, and mapped plant locations. The critical habitat selection process identified areas that

included essential habitat elements for the two plants. In the case of both large-flowered woolly meadowfoam and Cook's desert parsley, the essential elements are vernal pools and seasonally wet meadows; soil moisture for growth, reproduction, and seed dispersal; and soils that provide nutritional and physiological requirements. Seasonally wet meadows, sloped mixed-conifer openings, and shrubby plant communities are also essential elements for Cook's desert parsley.

Critical habitat, a term in the Endangered Species Act, identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management or protection. Federal agencies are required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on actions that might affect critical habitat. 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. Historically, most projects that are proposed within critical habitat go forward after review. A critical habitat designation on private or other non-federal land has no direct effect unless there is a federal connection, such as a project being authorized, funded, or carried out by a federal agency.

A March 2010 economic analysis estimated that potential economic impacts in areas designated as critical habitat for these two plants could range from \$95,200 to \$403,000 over the next 20 years. Most of these potential impacts would be administrative costs to federal agencies associated with additional consultation requirements intended to reduce or mitigate impacts from development, road work, and conservation efforts in the plants' habitat, which is also protected under the federal Clean Water Act and state law. The analysis found that the critical habitat designation for the plants was not likely to change the amount, design, or regulation of forecast economic activities in the area. No areas were excluded from the final critical habitat designation based on comments received on the proposal or the results of the economic analysis.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with several partners to recover these endangered plants, including the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy, as well as local entities and private landowners.

Large-flowered woolly meadowfoam (*Limnanthes floccosa* ssp. *grandiflora*) is a small annual plant with creamy white flowers in the meadowfoam family (Limnanthaceae). Cook's desert parsley (*Lomatium cookii*) is a perennial tap-rooted plant with pale yellow flowers in the parsley family (Apiaceae).

Plant conservation is vital to the function and overall health of ecosystems. Large-flowered woolly meadowfoam and Cook's desert parsley are part of ecosystems that also support wildlife such as the western meadowlark, burrowing owl, migratory waterfowl, and native bees that specialize on pollen of vernal pool flowers. These plants also provide significant resources for human use; for example, meadowfoam is cultivated to develop industrial oil for use as lubricants, cosmetics, waxes, and polymers in paints.

The final rule designating critical habitat was prepared under a court-ordered settlement agreement resulting from a lawsuit filed against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by the Center for Biological Diversity. The agreement required a final rule be submitted to the *Federal Register* by July 15, 2010. The rule takes effect 30 days after its *Federal Register* publication.

The *Federal Register* rule; critical habitat maps; and downloadable, public domain images of the large-flowered woolly meadowfoam and Cook's desert parsley are available at <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/>.

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