

News Release



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Plan Sets a Course for Iconic Prairie Species' Recovery

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a final recovery plan to address the survival needs of 13 rare species (two butterflies and 11 plants) native to the prairies of Oregon's Willamette and Umpqua Valleys and southwestern Washington. Prairies in this region are among the most endangered ecosystems in the United States, with less than 1 percent remaining.

The plan covers six species listed under the Endangered Species Act and recommends conservation strategies for seven other rare species, some of which are protected under state law. Listed species are the Fender's blue butterfly, Willamette daisy, Bradshaw's lomatium, Kincaid's lupine, Nelson's checkermallow, and golden paintbrush. Others are the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, pale larkspur, Willamette Valley larkspur, peacock larkspur, shaggy horkelia, white-topped aster, and Hitchcock's blue-eyed grass.

"Icons of our great northwestern prairies like the Fender's blue butterfly and Willamette daisy are just holding their own on fragments of their original habitat," said Paul Henson, state supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office.

"We're working with a cadre of committed partners to restore habitat and give these species a real chance to make a comeback," he added. "We're also taking a proactive approach for several struggling prairie-dependent species in the hope we can prevent them from needing the protection of the Endangered Species Act in the future."

Recovery plans are non-regulatory; they are road maps federal agencies and partners use to improve the status of imperiled species. In addition to providing a synthesis of the current knowledge and science for listed species, recovery plans help direct efforts and resources towards conservation of rare species and their habitats.

Extending through parts of 20 counties—14 in Oregon and six in Washington—the geographic scope of the recovery plan is roughly a 300-mile longitudinal band between the Coast and Cascade Ranges. Within this region, however, native prairies are very rare, and species that depend on these habitats are at risk of continued declines without a concentrated conservation program. Recovery will be determined by the number of populations, their sizes, and the likelihood they can withstand environmental variation and human impacts, not merely the amount of their habitat.

The plan's overall goal is to achieve viable populations of listed species distributed across their historical ranges by establishing networks of restored prairie sites. The plan also includes conservation actions for seven non-federally listed rare species because their needs are similar and related to the six species currently protected under the Act.

The plan establishes recovery zones and sets targets for population numbers and sizes needed to reclassify endangered species' status to the less dire threatened category (downlist) and ultimately to take species off the Endangered Species List altogether (delist). It specifies that target populations should exist on high quality prairie habitats in secure, conservation-oriented ownership that are managed and monitored to control threats. The expected time period to achieve recovery for listed species covered in this plan ranges from 10-25 years.

The plan focuses on restoring and protecting prairies on public lands largely because of their long-term conservation potential, but private landowners can play a significant role in recovery, too. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, Habitat Conservation Plans, and Safe Harbor agreements are all voluntary, non-regulatory avenues to help private landowners contribute to endangered species recovery.

All of the species addressed in the plan are subject to threats posed by the continued degradation, loss, and fragmentation of their native prairie ecosystems. This has been caused primarily by habitat conversion for agriculture and urban development, fire suppression, and the invasion of more aggressive, non-native plants.

The plan's overall strategy involves habitat restoration actions that mimic the processes that created and maintained prairies for thousands of years, and reintroducing species to those areas. For example, controlled burns, mowing, using grazers, and even hand-weeding in certain areas will mimic the historic disturbances (such as fires and flooding) that prevented the process of succession from transforming prairies into shrubs and trees and other vegetation.

Other recovery activities include evaluating known populations and looking for new ones, protecting occupied and potential sites, monitoring prairie quality at all sites, managing sites to reduce threats and expand populations, and collecting and banking seeds.

The cost of implementing the plan could be as much as \$6.8 million over the first 5 years. However, since the total cost is determined by adding up the cost of recovery actions for each species individually, and so many of these actions overlap, the total cost may be significantly overestimated. All efforts will build upon existing resources of recovery partners.

Development of the recovery plan was a coordinated effort involving the Western Oregon and Southwestern Washington Prairie Species Recovery Team, consisting of representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Oregon Department of Transportation, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Washington State University, and experts from the private sector. Consultants to the recovery team included representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers, Oregon State University, and The Nature Conservancy, among others.

The Prairie Species Recovery Plan is available in PDF format at <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/PrairieSpecies/default.asp>.

Downloadable, public domain images of the 13 prairie species are available at <http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/Species/PrairieSpecies/gallery.asp>.

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List of Prairie Species Covered Under Recovery Plan

Prairie Species	Federal Status	State Status OR	State Status WA	Additional Information
Fender's Blue Butterfly	E	E	---	
Willamette Daisy	E	E	---	
Bradshaw's Lomatium	E	E	E	New plan replaces and supersedes existing recovery plan.
Kincaid's Lupine	T	T	E	
Nelson's Checkermallow	T	T	E	New plan replaces and supersedes existing recovery plan.
Golden Paintbrush	T	E	E	New plan augments, but does not replace, existing plan. This is the only species out of the 13 currently extinct in the Willamette and Umpqua Valleys.
Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly	Candidate	---	E	
Pale Larkspur	---	E	E	
Willamette Valley Larkspur	---	Candidate	---	
Peacock Larkspur	---	E	---	
Shaggy Horkelia	---	Candidate	---	
White-topped Aster	---	T	Sensitive	
Hitchcock's Blue-Eyed Grass	---	---	---	Recognized as rare on the Oregon Natural Heritage Program List.