



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *Slickspot peppergrass (Lepidium papilliferum)*

#### **What is slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*)?**

The slickspot peppergrass is a small annual or biennial plant in the mustard family that occurs only in sagebrush-steppe habitats in southwestern Idaho, including the Snake River Plain, Owyhee Plateau and adjacent foothills. The plant grows to 4 to 12 inches in height, and it has many tiny white flowers that look much like the garden flower sweet alyssum. The flowers have four petals and four sepals, and each flower produces four seeds that are disk-shaped.

#### **Where does slickspot peppergrass occur?**

Slickspot peppergrass has been found in Ada, Canyon, Gem, Elmore, Payette and Owyhee counties. There are 70 "occurrences" currently supporting slickspot peppergrass - 18 others are considered to be extirpated (extinct) or historic locations (plants have not been relocated based on collections made between 1911 and 1974). The number of individual slickspot peppergrass plants at each occurrence may range from 1 to 3,000. Only six occurrences are considered to be high quality and contain over 1000 plants.

Slickspot peppergrass typically grows in sagebrush areas on depositional microsites known as "slickspots." Slickspots are inclusions of clay or alkaline soils within a larger matrix of saline soils. These microsites are often lower than the surrounding areas, and retain water longer than the surrounding soils. The microsites may be as small as a square foot, or as large as half a basketball court, and are usually surrounded by big sagebrush, native bunch-grasses and forbs, mosses and lichens. The total amount of habitat containing the small, interspersed slickspots and slickspot peppergrass plants is approximately 12,000 acres.

Twenty-eight of the 88 known or historic slickspot peppergrass occurrences are found either wholly or partially on private lands. The remaining occurrences are found on Federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the Department of Defense.

#### **What are the threats to slickspot peppergrass?**

Most of the remaining sites that support slickspot peppergrass are small and fragmented, and existing occurrences are vulnerable to impacts from habitat destruction and fragmentation from agricultural and urban development, grazing by domestic livestock and associated activities, competition from invading or seeded nonnative vegetation, changes in the frequency and intensity of fire, and fire rehabilitation activities.

#### **Why is slickspot peppergrass being proposed for listing as endangered?**

Based on the Service's evaluation, slickspot peppergrass meets the definition of endangered under the Endangered Species Act, which is a species in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The small amount of occupied habitat, combined with ongoing threats make this species vulnerable to extinction.



The loss or conversion of the sagebrush-steppe habitats in southwestern Idaho to annual grasslands has reduced suitable remaining habitat for slickspot peppergrass. Increased frequency of fire, and the associated invasion of weedy nonnative plants such as cheatgrass and medusa head, are serious rangewide threats to the long-term integrity of slickspot peppergrass habitats and population viability.

### **What happens now that the proposed rule has been published in the Federal Register?**

The Service is currently soliciting comments or suggestions from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning the proposed rule to list slickspot peppergrass as endangered. Written public input should be received by the Service by close of business on September 13, 2002. This public input will be used by the Service to assist in making the final determination on listing of this species. A final determination on a proposed listing is typically published in the Federal Register approximately one year from the publication of the proposed rule.

For activities on Federal lands, section 7(a)(4) of the Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to initiate conference activities with the Service on any action that is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species, or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat. During conference activities, alternatives to minimize effects to the proposed species are explored. The Federal action agency remains the decision agency, and decides on its own whether jeopardy exists, and whether or not to take action to reduce impacts to the species. However, current BLM policy directs that agency to initiate conference activities with the Service if an action may affect a species proposed for listing.

### **How would listing of slickspot peppergrass affect ongoing or future activities in southwest Idaho?**

If a species is listed, ongoing as well as proposed projects on Federal lands or on non-federal lands requiring federal funding or permits, would need to consult with the Service under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act if the project is located in slickspot peppergrass habitat. While some changes in management of activities on federal lands would likely be recommended in order to conserve and recover this species, the Service proposes to work with federal agencies to implement adaptive management strategies for conservation of this plant species. Voluntary cooperation from interested landowners to protect this species will also be encouraged.

### **What conservation efforts are ongoing for slickspot peppergrass?**

BLM has taken some steps to mitigate impacts to slickspot peppergrass on land it manages. BLM has relocated some water troughs to attract livestock away from areas that contain slickspot peppergrass, fenced one area containing the species to protect it from the livestock, and changed the season of grazing use from spring to fall on some allotments. BLM has also stopped using forage kochia, a forb species that may compete with slickspot peppergrass, in revegetation efforts following range fires in areas containing slickspot peppergrass habitat. In addition, depths for rangeland seed drills have been adjusted to reduce potential impacts to slickspot habitats during vegetation rehabilitation efforts. An existing conservation agreement is currently being updated between the City of Boise and the Service regarding conservation of slickspot peppergrass at the Boise Airport. A conservation agreement with City of Boise for the Hulls Gulch Reserve in the foothills north of Boise was completed in 1996. The Service, BLM, the Idaho Army National Guard, and the U.S. Air Force are coordinating and sharing information on matters relating to slickspot peppergrass.



**Will slickspot peppergrass interfere with ongoing military training activities in southern Idaho?**

The Service does not anticipate that the proposed listing of slickspot peppergrass would impact current military training activities in southern Idaho. Military training activities in southern Idaho conducted by both the Air Force and the Idaho Army National Guard do have the potential to impact this plant species. However, both military organizations are implementing actions to avoid or minimize impacts to slickspot peppergrass related to military training. Over the past 12 years, the Idaho Army National Guard has implemented actions to meet the conservation needs of slickspot peppergrass, while still providing for military training activities on the Orchard Training Area. These actions include intensive fire suppression efforts and restricting ground operated military training to places where the plant and its habitat are not found. The Air Force is also implementing actions at the recently constructed Juniper Butte Enhanced Training Range to reduce potential impacts to slickspot peppergrass through intensive fire suppression efforts and relocation of several industrial complex buildings prior to construction to avoid impacts to some slickspots. Air Force ground disturbing military training activities are primarily located within the 300-acre ordinance target area of the 12,000-acre Juniper Butte Enhanced Training Range, limiting the extent of potential military training impacts to the species.

For additional information, please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S.Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709, Telephone (208) 378-5243, FAX (208) 378-5262.

