

Q&A's for the Draft Recovery Plan for Vernal Pool Species November 2004

The plan can be viewed or downloaded at

http://pacific.fws.gov/ecoservices/endangered/recovery/vernal_pool/index.html

Q. What is a recovery plan?

A. Under the Endangered Species Act, recovery is the process by which the decline of an endangered or threatened species is arrested or reversed, and threats to its survival are neutralized, so that its long-term survival in nature can be ensured. The goal of this process is the maintenance of secure, self-sustaining wild populations of species with the minimum necessary investment of resources. A recovery plan delineates, justifies, and schedules the research and management actions necessary to support recovery of a species. Recovery plans do not, of themselves, commit manpower or funds, but are used in setting regional and national funding priorities and providing direction to local, regional, and State planning efforts.

Q. What species are included in this plan?

A. This draft recovery plan features 33 species of plants and animals that occur exclusively or primarily within vernal pools or swales in California and southern Oregon. The 20 federally listed species include 10 endangered plants, five threatened plants, three endangered animals, and two threatened animals.

The federally endangered plants are Loch Lomond button-celery, Contra Costa goldfields, Butte County meadowfoam, few-flowered navarretia, many-flowered navarretia, hairy Orcutt grass, Sacramento Orcutt grass, Lake County stonecrop, Greene's tuctoria, and Solano grass. The federally threatened plants are fleshy owl's clover, Hoover's spurge, Colusa grass, San Joaquin Valley Orcutt grass, and slender Orcutt grass.

The three federally endangered animals are the Conservancy fairy shrimp, longhorn fairy shrimp and vernal pool tadpole shrimp. The two federally threatened animals are vernal pool fairy shrimp and delta green ground beetle.

In addition, 13 species of concern are addressed. The plants include Ferris' milk vetch, alkali milk vetch, persistent-fruited saltscare, spiny-sepaled button-celery, Boggs Lake hedge-hyssop, Ahart's dwarf rush, legenera, little mouse tail, pincushion navarretia, and bearded popcorn flower. The animals include mid-valley fairy shrimp, California linderiella, and western spadefoot toad.

Q. What the threats to these species?

A. These species occur primarily in vernal pool or ephemeral freshwater habitats. Surrounding upland habitat is critical to the proper ecological function of these vernal

pool habitats. Threats to the species include habitat loss and fragmentation due to urban development, agricultural conversion, altered hydrology; non-native invasive species, inadequate regulatory mechanisms, and over- or under-grazing. The resulting small population sizes are subject to extinction due to random events like disease, floods, droughts, or inbreeding.

Q. What are the goals of this draft recovery plan?

A. The overall goals of this draft recovery plan are to delist the 20 federally listed plant and animal species, and ensure the long-term conservation of the 13 species of special concern. The interim goals of this draft recovery plan are to downlist to threatened status those species listed as endangered.

Q. What actions are being proposed for this recovery plan?

A. This draft recovery plan presents an ecosystem-level strategy for recovery and conservation because all of the listed species and species of concern co-occur in the same natural ecosystem and are generally threatened by the same human activities. The five key elements of the plan are habitat protection, habitat management, monitoring and research, species status surveys, and public outreach and education.

This draft recovery plan recommends the establishment of single recovery implementation team and several regional working groups, comprised of all stakeholders and interested parties to develop participation plans, coordinate education and outreach efforts, assist in developing economic incentives for conservation and recovery, ensure that adaptive management is practiced, and oversee the recovery of the species covered in this draft recovery plan.

The actions needed to meet the recovery criteria are: 1) form a single recovery implementation team, 2) develop and implement outreach programs, 3) protect and manage habitat within core areas, 4) refine areas for vernal pool conservation by conducting habitat assessments, 5) develop and implement cooperative programs and partnerships, 6) conduct research, 7) restore habitat where needed and manage vernal pool conservation areas, and 8) develop standardized monitoring protocols.

Q. How does a recovery plan affect landowners?

A. It does not affect them directly, unless they want to participate in conservation actions. Although the Service and other Federal agencies are required to implement a Recovery Plan, the participation of private landowners and stakeholders is voluntary. But the voluntary participation by landowners will be the key to successful recovery of these species.

Q. How does this recovery plan differ from critical habitat?

A. A recovery plan -- and the recovery regions it identifies -- differs from critical habitat in a number of ways. The biggest difference is that, unlike critical habitat, a recovery plan is a non-regulatory document.

The Service is required by law, in most cases, to officially designate specific areas as critical habitat for a species when listing it under the Endangered Species Act. Federal agencies must insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to result in habitat destruction or adverse modification of the designated areas. In August 2003, the Service designed 740,000 acres, in 30 California counties and one Oregon county, as critical habitat for 15 vernal pool plants and animals.

A recovery plan, in contrast, outlines conservation strategies. It attempts to ensure coordinated, effective recovery actions on the part of Federal and non-Federal agencies, non-governmental entities and private landowners. As part of those strategies, the plan can identify and set conservation priorities for specific areas, if it determines that those areas are important for conservation of species.

This plan outlines strategies to recover a total of 33 species, including the 15 species covered by critical habitat.

Q. Where will recovery actions occur?

A. The draft plan identifies core areas where one or more species, or important habitat, are known to exist. These core areas, which cover about 1.5 million acres, are classified as Priority 1, 2 or 3. *Most recovery actions will be targeted at Priority 1 core areas, which cover some 683,000 acres.* The recovery core areas are in 16 regions from southern Oregon to southern California. The regions are Carrizo, Central Coast, Klamath Mountains (Ore.), Lake-Napa, Livermore, Mendocino, Modoc Plateau, Northeastern Sacramento Valley, Northwestern Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin Valley, Santa Barbara, Solano-Colusa, Southeastern Sacramento Valley, Southern Sierra, Western Riverside, and San Diego.

Q. What distinguishes Priority 1, 2 or 3 core areas?

A. Priority 1 core areas have the highest biodiversity, or the greatest concentration of species and vernal pools. Priority 2 areas have slightly less concentration of habitats, and Priority 3 areas have the fewest species and habitats. At least initially, most recovery actions will be focused on Priority 1 core areas.

Q. How much will recovering these species cost, and how long will it take?

A. This draft recovery plan is designed to be implemented in a logical, progressive manner; emphasizing the completion of recovery actions in order of priority in Priority 1 core areas (683,000 acres) first, then in additional core areas (Priority 2 and 3), as necessary, until recovery is achieved.

The estimated cost of Priority 1 actions – that is, those that must be taken to prevent extinction or prevent the species from declining irreversibly in the foreseeable future – is \$771,689,680. The total estimated cost for all Priority 1-3 actions is nearly \$2.1 billion.

Under this plan, most listed species covered in this draft recovery plan will be recovered by 2062, or within 58 years. This timeframe is based on historical drought patterns in California, and calls for a 5-year monitoring period for species after a severe drought to evaluate the condition of the species.

Q. For a landowner, what will be the practical effect of being in a Priority 1 core area?

A. Priority 1 core areas are seen as most important to the species. The Service will target proactive voluntary programs and partnerships to landowners within Priority 1 core areas first.

Q. If property is both in critical habitat and a Priority 1 core area, what additional implications are there for the property owner?

A. None. In most cases, critical habitat has no impact on private landowners, and only applies to Federal agencies or projects that have some Federal involvement, such as funding or permits. Moreover, critical habitat has no bearing on how a recovery plan is implemented.

Q. How can I comment on this draft plan?

A. Submit comments to the Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, Attn: Vernal Pool Species Draft Recovery Plan, 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605, Sacramento, California, or by fax at 916/414-6713. Comments on the draft recovery plan must be received on or before March 18, 2005.

Also, the Service intends to schedule one or more workshops, to provide information on the draft plan and allow people to comment on it.

Q. When will a final plan be released?

A. In November or December 2005.