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News Release



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DRAFT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF PEIRSON'S MILK-VETCH CRITICAL HABITAT AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW AND COMMENT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today the availability of a draft economic analysis for the proposed designation of 52,780 acres of critical habitat for *Astragalus magdalenae* var. *peirsonii* (Peirson's milk-vetch). Comments on the draft economic analysis and proposed critical habitat designation will be accepted until May 6, 2004.

In the United States, the only known population of Peirson's milk-vetch is located within the Algodones Dunes. Much of the Algodones Dunes is managed by the Bureau of Land Management as part of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, an area heavily used by off-highway vehicle enthusiasts. There are 8 separate Management Areas within the ISDRA – critical habitat has been proposed within portions of 7 of the MAs.

The draft economic analysis includes an estimate of economic contributions for each Management Area within the ISDRA that includes proposed critical habitat. For example, contributions from the Mammoth Wash Management Area could be \$40,000 by the year 2013, but Glamis Management Area contributions could range as high as \$61.1 million for the same timeframe.

If all areas of the ISDRA proposed for designation were closed to OHV use, the regional economies of Imperial and Yuma counties would see an upper bound reduction in output of \$55 to \$124 million in the year 2013. These estimates represent about 2.4 percent of Imperial County's and less than 0.5 percent of Yuma County's total economic output. If no closures were to take place, the regional economic impact would be zero.

“To ensure the full range of potential impacts were captured, the analysis estimated costs associated with the listing of the plant, costs to agencies to fulfill their consultation obligations, and regional impacts that could occur if all of the proposed critical habitat areas were closed to OHV use,” said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service's California/Nevada Operations Office. “However, neither the BLM nor the Service anticipates closures will occur as a result of critical habitat.”

Under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Federal agencies are required to consult with the Service to ensure that projects they authorize, fund, or carry out do not jeopardize the continued existence of a federally listed species or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

Costs incurred by BLM and Service to conduct section 7 consultations are estimated to be \$11.3 million in the year 2013. The draft analysis also estimates that between 1998 – the year the plant was listed under the Act – and 2004, costs solely attributable to the listing of the plant were about \$24.5 million.

Based on a review of the economic impacts associated with designating a particular area as critical habitat, the Secretary of the Interior has the authority to exclude an area from designation if the benefit of exclusion is greater than including it as critical habitat.

Peirson's milk-vetch, a perennial member of the legume family, has delicate purple flowers. Well adapted to the harsh desert environment, the plant has a long tap root that penetrates deep into the sand to reach moisture and functions as an anchor in shifting sands. The plant produces large fruits each containing 11 to 16 flattened black seeds. Plants may flower in their first year and produce between one and five fruits, while older plants produce significantly more fruits.

Written comments on the critical habitat proposal and draft economic analysis should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92009. Comments may also be submitted by electronic mail (e-mail) to **fw1pmv@r1.fws.gov**.

Copies of the proposed rule and draft economic analysis and the proposed rule are available on the Internet at **<http://carlsbad.fws.gov>**. In the event Internet service is unavailable or you require a hard copy of the draft analysis, please contact the Carlsbad Office at 760/431-9440.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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