

News Release



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Public Comments Sought on Proposal to Protect 23 O‘ahu Species and Designate Critical Habitat for 124 Species *20 Plants and 3 Insects Proposed as Endangered*

Applying an ecosystem-based approach to species conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed to add 23 species found on the island of O‘ahu to the federal endangered species list. The Service also proposes to designate critical habitat for these 23 species, to designate critical habitat for 2 plant species that are already listed as endangered, and revise critical habitat for 99 plant species already listed as endangered or threatened. The 23 species – found only on the island of O‘ahu – include 20 plants and 3 Hawaiian damselfly species. Public comments on this proposal will be accepted until October 3, 2011.

Critical habitat for 99 plants was originally designated in 2003 but never previously designated for two plants, *Achyranthes splendens* var. *rotundata* (round-leaved chaff flower) and *Chamaesyce skottsbergii* var. *skottsbergii* (akoko). The Service is revising critical habitat for the 99 species because we believe the approach adopted here will establish an integrated, comprehensive ecosystem-based critical habitat designation. The intent of this comprehensive designation is to focus conservation management efforts on common threats across shared ecosystems, facilitate the restoration of ecosystem function and species-specific habitat needs for recovery of each of the 124 species, and make the critical habitat unit maps more understandable to the general public and conservation managers.

“Hawai‘i is a unique and special place in the natural world, and for that reason requires an innovative, holistic approach to conservation,” said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. “We are on the forefront of endangered species conservation and are the first Fish and Wildlife Office in the nation to utilize the ecosystem-based approach, for listing species and designating critical habitat, which will allow us to address the backlog of candidate species and ultimately, the health of entire ecosystems.”

Sixty-six multi-species units totaling 43,491 acres (17,600 hectares) in 7 different ecosystem types are proposed as critical habitat for the 124 species. Of the total acreage, 45 percent (19,695 acres) is located on State of Hawai‘i lands, 12 percent (5,184 acres) on Federal lands, 9 percent (3,730 acres) on City and County lands, and 34 percent (14,884 acres) on private lands. The Service used the best scientific and commercial data available in proposing critical habitat for these species.

The 20 plant species proposed for listing as endangered include an annual herb, shrubs, trees and a fern. The 3 animal species are the crimson Hawaiian damselfly, blackline Hawaiian damselfly and the oceanic Hawaiian damselfly. Of the 23 species proposed for listing, 19 are candidate species (16 plants and 3 damselflies), and 4 are plant species of concern, each with fewer than 50 individuals remaining. The 101 listed plant species include a variety of ferns, vines, shrubs, grasses, herbs and trees.

Candidate species are those taxa for which the Service has sufficient information on their biological status and threats to propose them for listing under the Endangered Species Act, but for which the development of a listing regulation has been precluded to date by other higher priority listing activities.

The species proposed for listing face numerous threats such as habitat destruction and modification by nonnative plants, introduced ungulates (i.e., pigs and goats), fire, stochastic events (i.e., hurricanes, landslides, flooding), agricultural and urban development, stream alteration, and climate change; predation by ungulates and other nonnative vertebrates (i.e., rats, fish and bullfrogs) and nonnative invertebrates (i.e., slugs and ants); inadequate existing regulatory mechanisms and other species-specific threats. The Service finds that all of these species face immediate and significant threats throughout their ranges.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands.

Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges and state wildlife management areas.

During the 60-day public comment period the Service is accepting all comments on the proposed rule and is specifically seeking information concerning:

- The amount and distribution of critical habitat for the species included in this proposed rule;
- What areas are currently occupied and that contain features essential for the species' conservation that we should include in the designation, and what areas not currently occupied are essential to the conservation of the species and why;
- Biological, commercial trade or other relevant data concerning threats (or lack thereof) to these species;
- Additional information about the range, distribution and population sizes of these species, including the locations of any additional populations;
- Any information on the biological or ecological requirements of these species;
- Current or planned activities in the areas occupied by the species and possible impacts of these activities on any of the 124 species;
- Information on areas that the critical habitat designation could potentially impact to a disproportionate degree;
- Economic data on the incremental costs of designating any particular area as critical habitat;
- Information on any quantifiable economic benefits of the designation of critical habitat;
- Whether the benefits of excluding any particular area from critical habitat outweigh the benefits of including that area in critical habitat under section 4(b)(2) of the Act;
- Information on economic impacts relevant to areas where the proposed critical habitat does not overlap with existing critical habitat for other species on the island of O'ahu;

- Any foreseeable economic, national security, or other potential impacts resulting from the proposed critical habitat designation and, in particular, any impacts on small entities, and the benefits of including or excluding areas that exhibit these impacts; and
- Whether we could improve or modify our approach to designating critical habitat in any way to provide for greater public participation and understanding, or to better accommodate public concerns and comments.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received by October 3, 2011. Requests for a public hearing must be received in writing by September 16, 2011. Comments can be sent by one of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal* at <http://www.regulations.gov> . Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- Via U.S. mail or hand delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: (FWS-R1-ES-2010-0043); Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

Copies of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. For further information contact: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96850; telephone 808/ 792-9400 or fax 808/ 792-9581.

The species proposed for endangered species status are:

Plants (20)	
Common Name	Scientific Name
ko‘oko‘olau	<i>Bidens amplexans</i>
hāhā	<i>Cyanea calycina</i>
hāhā	<i>Cyanea lanceolata</i>
hāhā	<i>Cyanea purpurellifolia</i>
ha‘iwale	<i>Cyrtandra gracilis</i>
ha‘iwale	<i>Cyrtandra kaulantha</i>
ha‘iwale	<i>Cyrtandra sessilis</i>
ha‘iwale	<i>Cyrtandra waiolani</i>
No common name	<i>Doryopteris takeuchii</i>
hulumoa	<i>Korthalsella degeneri</i>
alani	<i>Melicope christophersenii</i>
alani	<i>Melicope hiiakae</i>
alani	<i>Melicope makahae</i>
No common name	<i>Platydesma cornuta</i> var. <i>cornuta</i>
No common name	<i>Platydesma cornuta</i> var. <i>decurrens</i>
hala pepe	<i>Pleomele forbesii</i>
kōpiko	<i>Psychotria hexandra</i> ssp. <i>oahuensis</i>
kaulu	<i>Pteralyxia macrocarpa</i>
‘ohe	<i>Tetraplasandra lydgatei</i>
a‘e	<i>Zanthoxylum oahuense</i>

Insects (3)	
Common Name	Scientific Name
blackline Hawaiian damselfly	<i>Megalagrion nigrohamatum nigrolineatum</i>
crimson Hawaiian damselfly	<i>Megalagrion leptodemas</i>
oceanic Hawaiian damselfly	<i>Megalagrion oceanicum</i>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>

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Note to Editors: Images are available by calling Ken Foote at 808-792-9535.