

Peer Review Plan for Species Status Assessment for Three Utah Milkvetches: Cisco Milkvetch (*Astragalus sabulosus*), Stage Station Milkvetch (*A. vehiculus*), and Isely's milkvetch (*A. iselyi*)

Estimated Timeline of the Peer Review:

Draft document to be sent to peer reviewers: January 2022

Peer review initiated: January 2022

Peer review to be completed by: February 2022

Expected determination regarding species' status: The Species Status Assessment (SSA) will inform a listing decision for the three Utah milkvetch species expected before the end of Fiscal Year 2022

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, and our August 22, 2016 memorandum clarifying the peer review process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will solicit independent scientific review of the information contained in this SSA. The Service will nominate potential peer reviewers.

We will consider the following criteria for any potential nomination:

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with the three milkvetch species or with similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. In rare cases, a Service employee may be a valuable expert and may be used as a peer reviewer, provided that the employee is independent of the SSA Project Teams. If a Service employee is selected, we will still solicit peer review from at least three other experts. Academic, consulting, or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, we will select peer reviewers that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the species. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

We will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role, instructions for fulfilling that role, and the draft SSA. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the recovery plan is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the final recovery plan. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts.

Specific questions the reviewers will be asked include the following:

1. Is our description and analysis of the biology, habitat, population trends, and historic and current distribution of the species accurate?
2. Does the draft SSA report provide accurate and adequate review and analysis of the current and projected future condition of the species?
3. Are our assumptions and determinations regarding suitable habitat logical and adequate?
4. Are there any significant oversights, omissions, or inconsistencies in our draft SSA?
5. Are the conclusions we reach logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
6. Did we include all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions/arguments/conclusions?

Peer reviewers will provide individual responses to the Service via the Peer Review Portal. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will (1) be included in the administrative record for the SSA, and (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers before releasing the final draft SSA.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. We strongly encourage that public comments on the approach of this peer review be submitted by January 2022, in order to allow enough time for processing and consideration. However, we will accept comments on the peer review plan through the normal comment process associated with review of the SSA. The final draft SSA will inform a listing decision for the three species, which we expect to complete before the end of Fiscal Year 2022.

Contact

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