DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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THIRTEEN SCIENTIFICALLY VALUABLE PLANTS LISTED AS ENDANGERED OR THREATENED

Thirteen plants inhabiting fragile and unique ecological niches in 12 States and Canada have been listed as endangered or threatened by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Final rulemaking was published in the April 21, 1978, Federal Register. This is the second formal listing of plants under the Endangered Species Act of 1973; the first, in August 1977, listed as endangered four plants native to San Clemente Island off the Southern California coast.

The value of the 13 plants to man--challenged by some--is scientific and possibly economic. Clues are contained among these 13 plants to such questions as how Hawaii evolved and how Asian plants migrated to this continent. All are integral to unique ecosystems, some have endangered life forms as neighbors, and all contain thousands of chemicals.

Although the plants are listed in 12 States, no large land areas are involved.

Endangered plants are protected by several Federal regulations which were published in final form on June 24, 1977, and January 4, 1978. These regulations establish prohibitions against the import, export, or interstate commerce of plants determined as endangered or threatened species. In addition, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires Federal agencies

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to consider these plants and their critical habitats in all their actions. Exceptions to the prohibitions can be provided through a permit system of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Two of the plants are listed as threatened and 11 as endangered. The threatened plants and their States are:

Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, New York--Northern wild monkshood, Aconitum noveboracense, in the buttercup family and found only in the driftless area of Iowa and Wisconsin, as well as in Ohio and New York. Driftless areas are those that were surrounded but untouched by ice-age glaciers. The populations have been separated since the ice age, and the plant has not spread out of these isolated areas in 10,000 years.

Utah--The Rydberg milk-vetch, Astragalus perianus, is a member of the pea family. It was thought to be extinct. It has not been collected since 1905 when railroad construction through western territories and broader interests in geological surveys brought botanists for field study. It was recently found by a scientist in Utah and is known from only two populations. The area of one population has a dirt road running through it and is also leased for grazing.

The 11 endangered plants are:

Maine--The Furbish lousewort, Pedicularis furbishiae, named for Kate Furbish, was rediscovered along the upper portion of the St. John River in Maine in 1976, the first collection since 1943. It was thought extinct. In 1977, more plants were found, including some in New Brunswick, Canada. The continued existence of the plant depends upon maintaining its habitat along the scenic St. John River. Protecting the species will also contribute to the continued existence of other rare plants in the areas, many of which are at the extreme limit of their distribution and, as such, have distinctive gene pools. Forty percent of the 880 known specimens occur within the impoundment area of the proposed Dickey-Lincoln School Lakes project. The Service has expressed confidence that any problem concerning the endangered lousewort and the Dickey-Lincoln project could be resolved through consultation.

Georgia--The hairy rattleweed, Baptisia arachnifera, a nitrogen-fixing legume, is only found in a few square miles of the coastal plain of Georgia. It is an unusual pea family member because its leaves have evolved from compound leaves to a single leaflet, and the plant has developed a cobweb of wooly hairs which give it a silvery color.

Virginia--The Virginia round-leaf birch, Betula uber, was rediscovered in 1975 after being unknown for 60 years. Today a dozen trees occur along a single creek in Smyth County, Virginia. It is distinctive because it is one of three or four species of birch with wintergreen-scented bark. As such, this trait parallels many Southeastern U.S. plants whose nearest relatives are found only in Japan and East Asia.

California--The Santa Barbara Island liveforever, Dudleya traskiae, a member of the stonecrop family, is confined to one of the Channel Islands off California. It was thought to be extinct due to extensive vegetation losses caused by introduced hares. As the hares' numbers were reduced, a few sprouts of the dudleya began to grow from surviving rootstocks. Since that discovery, one inaccessible portion of a cliff with healthy plants has been identified.

California--The Contra Costa wallflower, Erysimum capitatum var. angustatum, and the Antioch Dunes evening-primrose, Oenothera deltoides ssp. howellii, occur only in sand dunes near Antioch, California. The first is a member of the mustard family, the second of the evening-primrose family. The name wallflower relates to its relatives which are grown in English gardens near walls as protection against frost. The Antioch Dunes once covered nearly 500 acres, but industrial, agricultural, and urban developments have reduced them to less than 50 acres.

California--The Eureka evening-primrose, Oenothera avita ssp. eurekensis, and the Eureka dune grass, Swallenia alexandrae, a unique grass genus, are native only to the Eureka Valley of California. The plants and their habitat were greatly threatened by off-road vehicles until the area was closed to such activities by the Bureau of Land Management. Enforcement is still needed. The Eureka dune grass does not fit clearly into any single subgroup of the grass family. Its evolution may be linked to the occurrence of other unusual grasses from Mexico. Several other plants and insects are known only from this general area.

Georgia, South Carolina--The persistent trillium, Trillium persistens, a showy, three-leafed wildflower of early summer, is restricted to an area less than 4 miles in diameter in Georgia and South Carolina. The main population is in a gorge which has been affected by trail construction and the use of the area as an outdoor amphitheater. It is an unusual spring flower because it remains green and active more than a month after other trilliums go dormant.

Hawaii--The Hawaiian wild broad-bean, Vicia menziesii, is a pea family member of Hawaii, a relative of the broad-bean, and the only one of its kind native in Hawaii. Seed probably reached the islands from the Americas, where all its relatives are native. Wild relatives of food crops like this species can teach science about natural disease resistance. Six mature plants are known to exist. Introduced animals, including wild sheep, goats, and pigs, have destroyed much of the natural vegetation, including this Hawaiian wild broad-bean.

Texas--Texas wild-rice, Zizania texana, grows year-round in the warm spring-fed waters of the San Marcos River in Texas and is one of three species of wild-rice found in North America. A fourth species in the genus, its only other relative, is native to East Asia. The Texas wild-rice could prove useful for improving cultivated wild-rice and in providing knowledge about disease resistance. This species was once very common in a portion of the San Marcos River. However, much of its natural habitat has been destroyed, and in recent years it has rarely produced seeds.

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