



Questions and Answers

Withdrawal of the Proposed Rule to List San Fernando Valley Spineflower as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act

Q. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

A. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is withdrawing a proposed rule to list the San Fernando Valley spineflower, (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*) a plant species in southern California, as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Proactive and voluntary conservation measures will reduce threats to the species such that the San Fernando Valley spineflower is no longer at risk of becoming an endangered species in the foreseeable future (the definition of ‘threatened’ under the Endangered Species Act).

Q. Why is the Service withdrawing its proposal to list the plant as threatened?

A. On-the ground habitat conservation and management measures will increase the number and condition of San Fernando Valley spineflower populations by reducing threats to the species, permanently protecting important habitat within the species’ range, and doubling the existing number of spineflower populations.

Q. What conservation measures are being taken?

A. In September 2017, the Service and Newhall Land and Farming Company completed a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA), which will conserve over 1,500 acres of property within Los Angeles and Ventura Counties to support spineflower conservation, establish additional plants in new and existing sites, and contribute to long-term management of the species. San Fernando Valley spineflower will be planted across multiple sites within the conserved areas including two sites where the plant was historically known to occur, a new site that provides suitable habitat for the species, and within an existing population near Santa Clarita. These conservation actions will result in at least two new, self-sustaining spineflower populations across the range of the species.

Q. What is a San Fernando Valley spineflower?

A. The San Fernando Valley spineflower is a low-growing herbaceous annual plant in the buckwheat family and is typical of many winter-spring native annuals that occur in the Mediterranean climate of California. Its historical range is thought to extend from near Elizabeth Lake, south through the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles County, to near Santa Ana in Orange County.

Q. Where does San Fernando Valley spineflower exist today?

A. The San Fernando Valley spineflower is predominately found within openings of sparsely vegetated scrub communities and grasslands in Ventura County and Los Angeles County in southern California. The population in Ventura County exists on protected and conserved lands that are part of the Upper Las Virgines Canyon Open Space Preserve, managed by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority. The population in Los Angeles County exists on land owned by Newhall Land and Farming Company.

Q. Will the San Fernando Valley spineflower populations be monitored in the future?

A. The Service remains committed to working closely with both public and private partners to ensure conservation of the San Fernando Valley spineflower in the future, and will evaluate both implementation and effectiveness of conservation measures over the next ten years, at which time the status of the species will be reassessed. The monitoring program for the spineflower introduction sites has been committed to through the 2017 CCA. Newhall Land has committed to fund endowments to support perpetual management and monitoring of the spineflower introduction sites. The Service will evaluate implementation of the spineflower introduction program based on compliance with the implementation schedule after five years. If the implementation criteria have not been met at that time, the Service will reinitiate a status assessment for the species. The Service will undertake a full evaluation of effectiveness based on the success criteria after ten years. If the success criteria have not been met at that time, the Service will reinitiate a status assessment for the species.

Q. How did the Rye Fire impact the San Fernando Valley spineflower?

A. Fire is a natural part of the Southern California landscape. The December 2017 Rye Fire burned a significant portion of Newhall Ranch, including spineflower-occupied habitat. The intensity of the fire is considered light based on analysis from the California Geological Survey and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The San Fernando Valley spineflower is likely relatively resilient to wildfire, as is typical of many native annuals in the Mediterranean climate of California. Numerous previous wildfire events have occurred on Newhall Ranch and several of these fires have affected extensive areas of habitat occupied by the spineflower. Spineflower monitoring began on Newhall Ranch in 2002 and two fires have affected the Santa Clarita population since then. Surveys conducted following those fires showed that year-to-year fluctuations in spineflower occupied area and population numbers within burned areas have generally been consistent with fluctuations in unburned areas. There have been no significant patterns relating historical fire frequency to spineflower cover, density, survival to flower, or size.

Q. What previous federal action has been taken by the Service?

A. The Service designated the San Fernando Valley spineflower as a candidate species for listing under the ESA in 1999. The plant was proposed for listing under the ESA in 2016 as a result of threats to the species including habitat loss from proposed development, invasive non-native plants and animals, and potential impacts of climate change.

Q. What is the purpose of the ESA?

A. When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973, it recognized that our rich natural heritage is of “esthetic, ecological, educational, recreational, and scientific value to our nation and its people.” It further expressed concern that many of our nation’s native plants and animals were in danger of becoming extinct. The purpose of the ESA is to protect and recover imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

Q. How does the Service determine whether or not a species should be listed under the ESA?

A. Section 4 of the ESA requires species to be listed as endangered or threatened solely on the basis of their biological status and threats to their existence. When evaluating a species for listing, the Service considers five factors: 1) damage to, or destruction of, a species’ habitat; 2) overutilization of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; 3) disease or predation; 4) inadequacy of existing protection; and 5) other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued existence of the species. When one or more of these factors imperils the survival of a species, the Service takes action to protect it. The Service is required to base its listing decisions on the best scientific information available.

For more information about the listing process:

<https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/listing.pdf>

https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/ESA_basics.pdf

Q. What information did the Service look for to help make a final determination?

A. The Service intends that any final action resulting from a proposed rule be based on the best scientific and commercial data available and be as accurate and as effective as possible. Therefore, we requested comments or information from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, Native American tribes, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties concerning the proposed rule. We particularly sought comments concerning:

(1) San Fernando Valley spineflower biology, range, and population trends, including:

- (a) Biological or ecological requirements of the species;
- (b) Genetics and taxonomy;
- (c) Historical and current range including distribution patterns;
- (d) Historical and current population levels, and current and projected trends; and
- (e) Past and ongoing conservation measures for the species, its habitat or both.

(2) Factors that may affect the continued existence of the species, which may include habitat modification or destruction, overutilization, disease, predation, the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, or other natural or manmade factors.

(3) Biological, commercial trade, or other relevant data concerning any threats (or lack thereof) to this species and existing regulations that may be addressing those threats.

(4) Additional information concerning the historical and current status, range, distribution, and population size of this species, including the locations of any additional populations of this species.

The Service also sought comments from independent specialists through a peer-review process to ensure the proposed designation is based on scientifically sound data, assumptions, and analyses. The purpose of such review ensures that our decisions are based on scientifically sound data, assumptions, and analysis.

In consideration of the CCA, we also requested information and comments regarding:

- (1) The efficacy of seed introduction for long-term establishment into suitable, unoccupied habitat of *Chorizanthe* or related taxa.
- (2) Whether the new areas proposed for seeding under the CCA will be appropriate to support populations of *Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*.
- (3) Whether the additional conservation areas and measures established under the Introduction Plan will afford sufficient resiliency, redundancy, and representation for the conservation of the species.