



News Release

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ARIZONA AGAVE PROPOSED TO BE REMOVED FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

The Arizona agave – a species listed as endangered since 1984 – has been confirmed to be a hybrid. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed removing it from the list of plants protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Hybrid plants – a phenomenon common among agaves – are not eligible for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Under the Act, it has been illegal to import, export or transport Arizona agave across state lines, or conduct interstate or international commerce or maliciously damage the plant. If delisted, the Arizona agave would continue to receive limited protection under Arizona’s Native Plant law, which requires a permit to remove plants from the wild or to sell them.

The plant was first described in 1970 as a unique species (*Agave arizonica*) from specimens collected in the New River Mountains of central Arizona. The 8 to 14-inch diameter and 12 to 16-inch tall succulent sprouts a flower stalk up to 13 feet tall. Fewer than 100 plants are known in the wild, all in Gila, Yavapai and Maricopa counties on the Tonto National Forest and private land in chaparral and juniper grasslands.

Since the listing, a growing body of evidence has led to the determination that the plant – found only where the range of Toumey’s agave (*A. toumeyana* var. *bella*) and the golden-flowered agave (*A. chrysantha*) overlap – is indeed a hybrid of the two parent-species. Controlled experiments on the reproductive limitations of the Arizona agave conducted at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix have confirmed that the plant is a hybrid.

The Service published its proposal to delist the Arizona agave in today’s Federal Register. The proposal is available at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>. Comments are being sought through March 14, 2005, and should be addressed to the Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Field Office, 2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021. Public hearing requests must be received by Feb. 28, 2005.

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, 64 fishery resources 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 and Native American tribal 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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NOTE TO EDITORS: Arizona agave photograph is available on the Internet at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>.