



News Release

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Southern New Mexico Cactus Improves; Extinction No Longer Imminent *Service reclassifies Kuenzler hedgehog cactus as “threatened”*

When first listed under the Endangered Species Act, only 200 Kuenzler hedgehog cacti were known from two locations in southeastern New Mexico. But the discovery of additional populations, together with efforts to conserve the plant and its habitat, indicate the small, magenta-flowered cactus is no longer at near-term risk of extinction. As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is downlisting the Kuenzler hedgehog cactus from “endangered” to “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

“Recognition that the species is better off today was only possible because of our partners’ extensive, long-term recovery efforts,” said Service Regional Director, Amy Lueders. “Specifically, continued surveying and monitoring under the Endangered Species Act have identified additional Kuenzler hedgehog cactus locations; that knowledge, together with Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management’s responsible management of the locations allows us to confidently determine that the cactus is not in danger of extinction.”

“Partnerships are vital to successful public-land management, including our shared conservation efforts that support this decision on the Kuenzler hedgehog cactus,” said BLM New Mexico Acting State Director Aden Seidlitz. “We look forward to working with our valued partners, including all those who use and enjoy our public lands, to ensure productive landscapes across New Mexico.”

When Kuenzler hedgehog cactus was identified as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1979, it prompted long-term research and population inventories. Surveyors through 2015 have found at least 4,330 plants at several news locations. Scientific models predict that 94,238 acres of potential habitat occur in the currently-known range with an estimated total population is between 11,000 and 20,000 individuals.

When listed, primary threats to the Kuenzler hedgehog cactus were its small population, private and commercial collection, road and real estate development, and livestock grazing. The illegal collection of the cactus is now less of a threat due to legal propagation and availability of the cactus in the commercial market. Where road construction has occurred in occupied areas, individual cacti have been avoided or mitigation has been provided – this avoidance and mitigation should continue once the species is reclassified as threatened. Residential development has not been a threat due to the preference of the plant to grow in dry, rugged locations not favored for development. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have worked with their

respective permittees to actively manage livestock to decrease the impacts of grazing on the cactus. Thus development, livestock grazing, and collection are not considered significant threats to the cactus at this time.

Additional threats, including drought and climate change and changing fire regimes, have been identified. The Service has completed a Species Status Assessment for the Kuenzler hedgehog cactus. Information garnered from the assessment guided the final determination on the cactus' down-listing and will instruct an updated recovery plan that fully addresses 21st Century threats and provide a road map for the cactus' complete recovery.

Kuenzler hedgehog cactus is a small cactus found on slopes of sandy gravel and amid rocky outcrops in southern New Mexico's Great Plains grasslands and oak or pinon-juniper woodlands. It has contorted, white, chalky-textured spines and large, magenta flowers that bloom only after the cactus reaches 4-5 years of age. (Its small size and cryptic coloration outside of flowering season, make it very difficult to detect.)

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