

News Release



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ESA Listing and Critical Habitat Proposed for Rare Marsh Plant Found Only in New Mexico

Following a rigorous review of the best available science, today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a proposal to list the striking, 8-foot-tall Wright’s marsh thistle as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The public may comment on the proposal for the next 60 days.

The sunflower-like plant was historically known to occur in wetland habitats across Arizona and New Mexico in the United States and Chihuahua and Sonora in Mexico. As its name implies, it is a rare wetland species that needs marshy habitats with year-round water-saturated soils to thrive. This striking sunflower-like plant can grow up to eight feet tall and is found in only eight localities in New Mexico.

The ESA listing of the Wright’s marsh thistle will generate greater public and stakeholder awareness about threats to the plant and inspire diverse conservation activities on its behalf. The special “4(d)” rule that is part of the listing proposal tailors protections to those needed to recover the thistle, such as prohibiting the damage, destruction or removal of the plant on federal lands, while streamlining regulatory processes for minor impacts.

Proposed critical habitat will benefit the Wright’s marsh thistle by identifying areas essential to its recovery that may require special management or protection. The Service is proposing eight units of critical habitat totaling 159 acres in Chaves, Eddy, Guadalupe, Otero and Socorro counties in New Mexico. The majority of the proposed units overlap with existing critical habitat for 10 other listed species. The Service does not anticipate direct impacts from the proposed rule to stakeholders or industry.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

After a review of the best available scientific and commercial information, the Service determined the Wright's marsh thistle is at risk of extinction in the foreseeable future due to the scarcity, small size and isolation of its remaining populations. Additional threats to the species include decreased water availability, competition with native and non-native plants, cattle grazing and effects from oil and gas development.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia and malaria and to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

The proposal will publish in the *Federal Register* on September 29, 2020 and public comments will be accepted until November 30, 2020. The proposed rule and supporting documents are available for comment online at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under docket number FWS-R2-ES-2018-0071. We encourage the public, academia, federal and state agencies, industry and other stakeholders to review the proposal and provide comments. A final decision to list or withdraw the proposal is typically made within a year after the proposal.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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