



News Release

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office
2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021
602/242-0210
602/242-2513 (Fax)

Arizona Ecological Services Field Office

www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/

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Contacts: Jeff Humphrey (602) 242-0210 x222

Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Comments on Road Map to Recovering Endangered Southern Arizona Plant

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has drafted a recovery plan for the endangered Huachuca water umbel – an aquatic plant protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1997. When completed, the recovery plan will help guide efforts needed to conserve the plant, and identify occurrence and habitat goals to determine when the umbel has successfully recovered and can be removed from the list of plants protected by the Act. The Service is soliciting comments on the draft plan and new information on the status of the umbel through May 9, 2016.

The Huachuca water umbel (*Lilaeopsis schaffneriana* ssp. *recurva*) has vertical, hollow, slender leaves that are 1-13 inches long. They typically grow in clusters connected along a horizontal root and produce tiny white and maroon-tinted, five-petal flowers.

Huachuca water umbel occur in shallow and slow-flowing cienegas, rivers, streams, and springs of five watersheds in Cochise and Santa Cruz counties in southeastern Arizona and adjacent portions of Sonora, Mexico. In the United States, there are 17 known locations supporting umbel occurrences, 6 locations where no occurrences have been relocated in recent years, and 8 locations where the umbel is believed to be extirpated. There are 21 known locations supporting the umbel in Sonora, Mexico – though most have not been revisited in recent years.

It is difficult to estimate the number of individuals due to the clonal nature of the plant, though estimates of density indicate no occurrences are increasing in size and many are reported from single patches among competing vegetation or in aquatic habitat that is in danger of being lost to groundwater pumping or drought – its greatest threat. Other threats to the Huachuca water umbel include wildfire and resulting sedimentation and scouring, invasive non-native plant competition, and livestock grazing during dry times when livestock are congregated in wet areas.

“Our draft plan calls for active engagement by many partners,” said Steve Spangle, Fish and Wildlife Service Arizona Field Supervisor. “When a diminutive, yet hardy native plant has trouble making a go of it in our desert waterways, it sends us a message regarding the state of our waters – for us and other species. An effective plan for the persistence and recovery of the water umbel is important to all agencies, desert dwellers, our agriculture and those drawn to our State’s riparian areas.”

The draft recovery plan focuses on conserving and enhancing habitat quality – including decreasing groundwater pumping, and increasing water conservation and recharge in umbel’s three U.S. watersheds. The draft plan also identifies the importance of protecting existing and introduced umbel occurrences, managing threats, monitoring progress, and building partnerships to facilitate recovery. It establishes goals

for securing self-sustaining umbel occurrences that persist over 20-30 years to achieve success – the plant’s recovery and removal from the lists of endangered and threatened endangered species.

“Recovery of the umbel and conservation of our riparian areas will require continued responsible water planning that includes retaining surface water in our streams,” said Spangle.

The draft recovery plan will undergo peer review and public comments will be considered before being finalized. A recovery plan is not a legally binding document, but a blueprint for actions needed to improve the status of a listed species to the point where it no longer needs the protection of the Act. Recovery is a process by which the decline of an endangered or threatened species is arrested or reversed, and threats to its survival are neutralized, so that the long-term survival in nature can be ensured.

Persons wishing to review the draft revised recovery plan can obtain a paper or electronic copy from the Arizona Ecological Services Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951; by phone at (602) 242-0210; or from the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/HuachucaUmbel.htm>. Written comments and materials pertaining to the draft recovery plan may be mailed to “Field Supervisor” at the address above or emailed to Julie_Crawford@fws.gov. To ensure that comments are considered, they should be received no later than May 9, 2016.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Photographs of the Huachuca water umbel are available at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Plants.htm>; additional photos are available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (jeff_humphrey@fws.gov, 602/242-0210 x222).