

FICKEISEN PLAINS CACTUS
(Pediocactus peeblesianus var. fickeiseniae)

STATUS: Endangered (78 FR 60607; October 1, 2013) with critical habitat (81 FR 55265, August 18, 2016).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Very small unbranched to occasionally branched globose cactus. Stems of mature plants are 2.5 to 6.5 centimeters (cm) (1.0 to 2.6 in) tall and up to 5.5 cm (2.2 in) in diameter. They are covered with turbercles that form a spiral pattern around the plant.. Each turbercle has 6 to 7 radial spines that are spongy with a long central spine (1.5 to 1.8 cm (0.59 to 0.70 in) that is strongly curved. Flowers are creamy white and bloom mid-April to mid-May; fruiting occurs mid-May to early June. The cactus then retracts below ground and can become buried by surface gravel making detection difficult outside the flowering period.

HABITAT: Taxon occurs within the Plains and Great Basin grasslands and Great Basin desert scrub vegetation communities at elevations between 1,280 to 1,814 m (4,200 to 5,950 ft). Populations are found in shallow, gravelly, and well-drained soils derived from exposed layers of Kaibab limestone. Plants are found on the margins of canyon rims, flat terraces or benches, or on the toe of well-drained hills with less than 20 percent slope.

RANGE: Historic: Unknown but likely similar to the current distribution.

Current: Endemic to Colorado Plateau. It is known to occur in widely scattered, small populations on the Colorado Plateau in Coconino and Mohave counties. The range of the cactus encompasses the Arizona Strip (i.e., the area north of the Colorado River to the Arizona-Utah border) from Mainstreet Valley in Mohave County to House Rock Valley in Coconino County, along the canyon rims of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers, to the area of Gray Mountain, and along the canyon rims of Cataract Canyon on the Coconino Plateau.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Current threats include trampling by livestock, nonnative invasive species, rodent and rabbit herbivory, drought, and climate change that exacerbate the effects of small population size. The species is a narrow endemic restricted to Kaibab limestone-derived soils. Because of its rarity and disjunct occurrence, this cactus is vulnerable to depopulation by damage to areas where it occurs. The species seems to have low reproductive capacity, even during favorable weather conditions.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: The cactus occurs on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Navajo Nation, and Arizona State Land Department. It also occurs on private land.

NOTES: Critical habitat is designated on 7,062 hectares (17,456 acres) in Coconino and Mohave counties (81 FR 55265). The Fickeisen plains cactus is also protected by the Arizona Native Plant Law as a highly safeguarded native plant.