



# News Release

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Arizona Ecological Services Field Office <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>

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## Two Arizona Cacti to Receive Endangered Species Act Protection

Two cacti species have been added to the list of endangered plants protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) – the acuña cactus of southern Arizona and the Fickeisen plains cactus of northern Arizona. When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initially proposed ESA protection last October, it included a proposal to designate critical habitat for each species to elicit increased Federal agency assistance in conserving cacti habitat. A final critical habitat determination will be forthcoming soon.

“These two cacti are emblematic of two of Arizona’s diverse deserts,” said Steve Spangle, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Arizona field supervisor. “Identifying that they are declining and the causes of decline are the first steps in reversing the trend and restoring their desert ecosystems.”

The acuña cactus (*Echinomastus erectocentrus* var. *acunensis*) is a small spherical cactus that occurs in valleys and on small knolls and gravel ridges in the Sonoran desert scrub of southern Arizona’s Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties and in Sonora, Mexico. The total rangewide population is estimated at 3,600 plants, including about 1,000 in Mexico.

The Service first identified the acuña cactus as a candidate for ESA protection in 1993. Over the past two decades, 75-85 percent mortality and virtually no surviving young plants have been documented within monitored populations. The principal threats to the acuña cactus are drought and climate change in combination with predation by native insects and small mammals. Secondary threats include nonnative, invasive plant species and U.S.-Mexico border activities.

The Fickeisen plains cactus (*Pediocactus peeblesianus* var. *fickeiseniae*) is a rounded, quarter-sized cactus that retracts below ground during the winter and summer months. It is restricted to small, isolated populations that grow in soils derived of Kaibab limestone on the Colorado Plateau in Coconino and Mohave counties, Arizona. About 1,100 Fickeisen plains cacti among 33 populations have been documented rangewide since the species’ discovery in the late 1950s.

The Service first identified the Fickeisen plains cactus as a candidate for ESA protection in 1980. Monitoring data from a limited number of sites representing the majority of the rangewide population indicate significant population declines due to several threats acting together. These threats are habitat disturbance from livestock grazing, rabbit and rodent predation, and small population size; all compounded by drought and climate change.

Today's listing is part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan that resolves a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA Listing Program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce litigation-driven workloads and allow the agency to focus its resources on the species most in need of the ESA's protections over the next several years.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled plant and animal species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

The Service's determination will publish in the *Federal Register* tomorrow and become effective on Oct. 31, 2013. The determination and relevant documents are available at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/> or <http://www.regulations.gov> (Docket No. FWS-R2-ES-2012-0061), or by request from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2321 W. Royal Palm Rd., Suite 103, Phoenix, AZ 85021-4951; phone 602/242-0210 or fax 602/242-2513.

*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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).*

Note to Editors: General cacti location maps and additional information are available at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Acuna.htm> and <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Fickeisen.htm>. Photo support is at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Plants.htm>.