



Final Rule to Designate Critical Habitat for Vandenberg Monkeyflower

Questions and Answers

Q. What is a Vandenberg monkeyflower?

A. The Vandenberg monkeyflower (*Diplacus vandenbergensis*) is a small annual herb of the Phrymaceae (lopseed) family found in Santa Barbara County, California. It grows from 0.5 to 10 inches tall and produces one to several yellow flowers on purple-tinted stems. Members of this genus have markings and a petal formation that resemble a face, hence the name “monkeyflower.”

The plant occurs at low elevations and close to the coast in sandy openings (canopy gaps) of maritime chaparral and coastal scrub, mixed with oak woodland and small patches of native grasslands and is almost exclusively found on thin layers of wind-blown sand.

As with other species adapted to California’s Mediterranean climate, the Vandenberg monkeyflower germinates during winter rains between November and February and flowers from late March through June.

The Vandenberg monkeyflower is only known to occur on Burton Mesa, a distinct geographic region located in western Santa Barbara County. The mesa—a series of low, flat-topped hills averaging 400 feet in elevation—is located between the Purisima Hills to the north and the Santa Ynez River to the south.

Q. What action is being taken?

A. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is publishing the final rule to designate critical habitat for the Vandenberg monkeyflower (*Diplacus vandenbergensis*). The proposed rule to designate critical habitat was published on October 29, 2013, along with a proposed rule to list the plant as endangered. The final listing rule to designate the plant as endangered was published in the *Federal Register* on August 26, 2014.

Q. What is Critical Habitat?

A. Critical habitat is a term used within the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that identifies geographic areas of particular importance to the conservation of a threatened or endangered

species. Critical habitat is designed to identify the essential elements of physical and biological features of a landscape and essential areas that a species needs to survive and reproduce.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, preserve, or other conservation area, nor does critical habitat designation impact private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require Federal funding or permits.

Critical habitat designations are a tool to guide federal agencies in fulfilling their conservation responsibilities by requiring them to consult with the Service on projects that may impact the species.

Critical habitat requires the Service to gather more detailed information about a species than what is required for listing. This information leads to increased knowledge about the species and its habitat that the Service can share with federal, state and local agencies, which in turn increases the effectiveness of conservation actions for the species.

Q. How is critical habitat determined?

A. Biologists consider physical and biological features needed for life processes and successful reproduction of the species in order to determine critical habitat. These include:

- space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;
- cover or shelter;
- food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements;
- sites for reproduction; and
- habitats that are protected from disturbances or are representative of the historic geographical and ecological distributions of a species.

In consultation for those species with critical habitat, Federal agencies are required to ensure that their activities do not adversely modify critical habitat to the point that it will no longer aid in the species' recovery.

Q. Where is the Service designating critical habitat?

A. The Service is designating critical habitat in areas within the geographical area occupied by Vandenberg monkeyflower at the time of listing that contain the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species and that may require special management considerations or protections. The specific areas are located on Burton Mesa in western Santa Barbara County, California. This includes areas known to support Vandenberg monkeyflower and contiguous areas that have suitable habitat to support the species.

Q. Who owns the lands being proposed for critical habitat?

A. Of the approximately 5,755 acres proposed for critical habitat, 4,674 acres are on state lands within the Burton Mesa Ecological Reserve, which is managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and La Purisima Mission State Historical Park, which is managed by

California State Parks. The remaining areas proposed for critical habitat consist of 820 acres on private lands, 38 acres on local agency lands, and 223 acres on Federal Department of Justice lands at the Lompoc Penitentiary.

Vandenberg monkeyflower also occurs on federal lands on Vandenberg Air Force Base. The Service has exempted 4,159 acres of suitable habitat from a critical habitat designation because conservation efforts for the species are included as part of the Base's Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan.

Q. What type of management activities would help limit the impact of threats to Vandenberg monkeyflower?

A. Management activities that may reduce threats to the species include, but are not limited to:

1) Minimizing impacts from development in the plant's suitable habitat; 2) Minimizing habitat fragmentation; 3) minimizing the spread of invasive, nonnative plants; 4) limiting authorized casual recreational use to existing paths and trails; 5) controlled burning; and 6) habitat restoration.

These activities would help decrease the loss of habitat, maintain the appropriate vegetation structure required by the plant, and help preserve large areas of contiguous habitat throughout the species' range.

Q. What conservation measures are provided to species listed as endangered or threatened under the Act?

A. Conservation measures provided to species listed as endangered or threatened under the Act include recognition, recovery actions, requirements for Federal protection, and prohibitions against certain practices.

Listing a species under the ESA encourages public awareness and conservation by Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies, private organizations, and individuals. The Act encourages cooperation with the States and requires that recovery actions be carried out for all listed species. The protection required by Federal agencies and the prohibitions against certain activities are discussed, in part, below. The primary purpose of the Act is the conservation of endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. The ultimate goal of such conservation efforts is the recovery of these listed species, so that they no longer need the protective measures of the Act. The Act requires the Service to develop and implement recovery plans for the conservation of endangered and threatened species.

Q. What happens next?

A. Recovery of a species requires the participation of a broad range of partners, including other Federal agencies, States, Tribal, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, and private landowners.

The recovery of many listed species cannot be accomplished solely on Federal lands because their ranges may occur primarily or solely on non-Federal lands. To achieve recovery of these species requires cooperative conservation efforts on private, State, and Tribal lands.

Funding for recovery actions may be available from a variety of sources, including federal budgets, state programs, and cost share grants for non-Federal landowners, the academic community, and nongovernmental organizations. Additionally, the State of California is eligible to apply for Federal funds to implement management actions that promote the conservation and recovery of Vandenberg monkeyflower.

The Act requires federal agencies to ensure that activities they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat. If a Federal action may affect a listed species or its critical habitat, the responsible Federal agency must enter into consultation with the Service.