

News Release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lists Three South Florida Plants as Endangered

VERO BEACH, FL. -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is listing three plant species native to south Florida as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). These three species are the Cape Sable thoroughwort, Florida semaphore cactus, and Aboriginal prickly-apple.

The Cape Sable thoroughwort was historically known from Monroe County, both on the Florida mainland and the Florida Keys, and in Miami-Dade County along Florida Bay. The thoroughwort's current range includes areas in Everglades National Park and five islands in the Florida Keys. A flowering perennial herb, the Cape Sable thoroughwort occurs in rockland hammocks, coastal hardwood hammocks, buttonwood forests, coastal rock barrens, and coastal berms.

The Florida semaphore cactus was historically known from three islands of the Florida Keys in Monroe County and an island in Biscayne Bay in Miami-Dade County. Its current range includes two naturally occurring populations, one on Biscayne National Park and one on The Nature Conservancy's lands. The Florida semaphore cactus is found in hardwood hammocks near sea level and low elevation buttonwood forests in the transitional area between rockland hammocks and mangrove swamps.

The Aboriginal prickly-apple was historically known from coastal habitats of southwest Florida along the Gulf coast in Manatee, Charlotte, Sarasota, and Lee counties. The prickly-apple was documented on six keys along approximately 78 miles of coastline. The northern extent of its historic range in Manatee County has since been lost is now found on along only 62 miles of coastline. A cactus, the Aboriginal prickly-apple is found in coastal berms, coastal strand, maritime hammocks, and coastal grasslands with a sand substrate. It also occurs on shell mounds created by Native American cultures.

The Service's final rule listing all three plants as endangered appears in the October 24, 2013 Federal Register. The protection for these three plants under the ESA becomes effective on November 25, 2013, 30 days after the rule is published in the Federal Register. For endangered plants, it is illegal under the ESA to take, damage, or destroy any such plants, from areas under federal jurisdiction or in knowing violation of any law or regulation of any State; or to possess, import, export or conduct interstate or international commerce without authorization from the Service. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or undertake do not jeopardize the existence of listed species.

The listing of these three plants is part of the Service's effort 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 five years.

The ultimate goal of the ESA is the recovery of these three plants, so that they no longer need the protective measures of the ESA. The Service will now develop a recovery plan for the three species and work cooperatively with partners to conserve their habitats.

The Service initially proposed to protect these three Florida plants and sought public comment on October 11, 2012, and again sought public input on August 7, 2013. All comments received are posted at <http://www.regulations.gov> and are addressed in the final listing rule. For more information about these three plants and the final rule, please visit www.fws.gov/verobeach or the Federal Register at <http://www.regulations.gov>, Docket FWS-R4-ES-2012-0076.

All three plants are currently at risk of extinction throughout all of their respective ranges due to the immediacy, severity, and scope of threats from habitat destruction and modification. Additional threats occur for the two cacti, Florida semaphore cactus and Aboriginal prickly-apple, in the form of overutilization, collection, poaching, and vandalism. The Florida semaphore cactus also is affected by disease and predation by the nonnative Cactus Moth.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and 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 www.fws.gov/southeast. Connect with us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws>, and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>.