

USFWS News Release

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Designates Critical Habitat For the Cape Sable Thoroughwort

VERO BEACH, FL. -- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is designating critical habitat for the endangered Cape Sable thoroughwort under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The listing of the Cape Sable thoroughwort as endangered was announced in the October 24, 2013 Federal Register, and became effective on November 25, 2013.

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 current range of Cape Sable thoroughwort includes areas in Everglades National Park and five islands in the Florida Keys. Cape Sable thoroughwort is a flowering perennial herb found in rockland hammocks, coastal hardwood hammocks, buttonwood forests, coastal rock barrens, and coastal berms. The decline of Cape Sable thoroughwort is primarily the result of habitat loss from commercial and residential development, sea level rise, storms, competition from non-native plants, predation by non-native herbivores, and wildfires.

The Service is designating critical habitat for the Cape Sable thoroughwort in nine separate units across approximately 10,968 acres of Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, Florida. Seven of the units are occupied by the plant. Land ownership within the critical habitat area consists of federal (70 percent), state (23 percent), and private and other (6 percent).

The designation of critical habitat for the Cape Sable thoroughwort 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 few years.

A draft economic analysis was conducted to determine the potential impact of the thoroughwort's critical habitat designation on various sectors of the economy. Based on the best available information, the Service estimates that the designation may cost between \$578,000 to \$982,000 over the next 20 years, or \$38,000 to \$49,000 on an annual basis depending on the discount rate. According to the draft economic analysis, most of the costs would be attributable to consultations regarding federal land management and restoration and conservation activities with the remaining seven percent

attributable to development in the area. More than half of the estimated incremental costs are expected to result from actions occurring within the Key Largo unit in Monroe County, Florida.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. The designation of critical habitat on private land has no impact on private landowner activities that do not require federal funding or federal permits. The regulatory implications of designating of critical habitat only apply to federal activities.

Designating critical habitat on federal or non-federal lands informs landowners and the public of the specific areas that are important to the conservation of the species. Identifying this habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals.

The Service initially proposed to protect the Cape Sable thoroughwort, along with two south Florida cacti, Florida semaphore cactus and aboriginal prickly-apple, on October 11, 2012. At the same time, the Service proposed designation of critical habitat for the thoroughwort. The Service re-opened the comment period on both actions on August 7, 2013. All comments received are posted at <http://www.regulations.gov> and are addressed in the thoroughwort's January 8, 2014 final critical habitat designation rule. The critical habitat designation goes into effect on February 7, 2014, 30 days after its publication in Federal Register.

For more information about these actions, please visit www.fws.gov/verobeach or the Federal Register at <http://www.regulations.gov>, Docket # FWS-R4-ES-2012-0076 and Docket # FWS-R4-ES-2013-0029.

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>.