

News Release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

September 28, 2016

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Listing Four South Florida Plants as Threatened or Endangered

VERO BEACH, Fla. -- Four plants only found in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties are being listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

A shrub, Big Pine partridge pea, and two herbs, wedge spurge and sand flax, are being given endangered status, meaning these plants are in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

The fourth plant, a shrub called Blodgett's silverbush is being given threatened status, meaning the silverbush is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

All four plants are endangered on the State of Florida's Regulated Plant Index. The Service is not designating critical habitat for the four plants at this time.

"Numerous threats to these four plants currently exist and are likely to continue in the foreseeable future across their entire range," said Cindy Dohner, the Service's Southeast Regional Director. "Many populations of these four plants have vanished from their historical ranges across South Florida."

The listings become effective October 31, 2016, 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

Although these plants will now be listed under the ESA, the Service will continue to work with partners such as the State of Florida, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties, Fairchild Botanical Gardens, the Institute for Regional Conservation and Homestead Air Reserve Base to conserve their habitat.

The populations of these plants are small and isolated because most of the surrounding habitat has been developed. They occur on a mix of public and private land in the two counties. The bulk of the remaining populations are on public lands. Big Pine Partridge pea and wedge spurge occur in the lower Florida Keys. The pea occurs on Big Pine Key and Cudjoe Key and the wedge spurge occurs only on Big Pine Key. These lands are owned in large part by the Service and the State of Florida and managed as the National

Key Deer Refuge. In addition to occurring in the Lower Keys in the same areas as the partridge pea and wedge spurge, Blodgett's silverbush also occurs throughout the Florida Keys in small populations. Sand flax also occurs in Miami-Dade County in remnant pine rockland areas and disturbed areas such as canal banks.

Some of the populations of these plants are found in the Miami-area pine rockland habitat being considered for two construction projects: Coral Reef Commons and Miami Wild.

It is not prohibited by the ESA to destroy, damage or move protected plants unless such activities involve an endangered or threatened species on federal land, are federally funded, require a federal permit, or occur in violation of state laws. If a person wishes to develop private land, with no federal jurisdiction involved, in accordance with state law, then the potential destruction, damage, or movement of endangered or threatened plants does not violate the ESA.

If the action is proposed on federal land, requires a federal permit, or is federally funded, the federal agency must consult with the Service to ensure the action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

Plants are the property of the landowner where they grow. The Service hopes that landowners would be good stewards of any federally-listed plants on their property, and the Service has a program -- the Partners for Fish and Wildlife -- which provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to manage their property. The Act does make it illegal to engage in interstate or foreign commerce or import or export federally-listed plants; attempt to commit these acts, cause them to be committed, or solicit another to commit them. Otherwise, there are no other implications for private landowners.

These four plants had been candidates for federal listing since 1985. The listing of these plants is part of the Service's efforts to implement a court-approved work plan aimed at addressing a series of lawsuits concerning the agency's ESA listing program. The intent of the agreement, which will be completed this fall, is to recover species and significantly reduce a litigation-driven workload. For more information, please see <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/>.

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. 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>.

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