

ESA listing of four South Florida plants

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

The Service is publishing a final rule to list four south Florida plants under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Everglades bully, Florida pineland crabgrass, and pineland sandmat are listed as threatened and the Florida prairie-clover is listed as endangered.

2. Why is the Service taking these actions?

The Service has determined that each of these plants is currently at risk throughout all of their range, primarily because of habitat loss and modification, and because the populations are small, isolated, and have limited to no potential for recolonization. Sea level rise also is a concern. Impacts from various threats are ongoing and increasing, and place the four plants in danger of extinction now, or in the foreseeable future. The Florida prairie-clover is being listed as endangered because it is presently in danger of extinction. The Everglades bully, Florida pineland crabgrass, and pineland sandmat are being listed as threatened because they are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

3. What are the characteristics of these plants?

Everglades bully is a perennial single or many-stemmed shrub that grows to about three to six feet tall, with white flowers. It is found in pine rocklands, marl prairies, and within the ecotone between both habitats. The current range of this species consists of 10 populations in Miami-Dade County, including Everglades National Park (ENP), and an additional small population within Lostman's Pines region of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) in Monroe County (mainland only).

Florida pineland crabgrass is a small perennial clumping grass, blue-green to gray in color with hairy, reddish-brown stems. The plant's flowers are dull green and very small. It is found in pine rocklands, marl prairies, and within the ecotone between both habitats. Florida pineland crabgrass lives only within the Long Pine Key region of ENP (Miami-Dade County) and the Lostman's Pines region of BCNP (mainland Monroe County). The species had disappeared from historic Miami-Dade County locations adjacent to ENP, due largely to habitat loss.

Pineland sandmat is a small perennial herb, with greenish oval-shaped leaves and reddish stems. The extensive root system of pine sandmat indicates that it is a long-lived plant. The species will flower and fruit year-round, with peaks in the fall, as well as after stimulation after fire. This species can be found in pine rocklands, marl prairies, and within the ecotone between both habitats in Miami-Dade County. The current range of this species consists of 20 populations in Miami-Dade County, including ENP. One historical population in Miami-Dade County (Larry and Penny Thompson Park) has disappeared due largely to habitat loss.

Florida prairie-clover is a perennial shrub that grows to about three to six feet tall, with a light brown woody stem and non-woody, light brown or reddish branches. Its flowers are whitish, but turn maroon with age. Fruit is produced small, hairy, one-seeded pods. This species can be found in pine rocklands, rockland hammocks, marl prairies, adjacent roadsides and within the ecotone between these habitats. Florida prairie-clover is found within BCNP (mainland Monroe County), as well as seven locations in Miami-Dade County (including one reintroduction site, Virginia Key). Florida prairie-clover has disappeared from four historical locations within Miami-Dade County, including ENP. In addition, the subspecies has disappeared from at least one location in Palm Beach.

4. What criteria did the Service use to determine if these plants should be listed as endangered or threatened?

Under the ESA, the Service can determine that a species is endangered or threatened based on any of five factors: (A) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; (B) Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (C) Disease or predation; (D) The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; or (E) Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

We have determined that the threats to these four plants consists primarily of habitat loss and modification through urban and agricultural development, and lack of adequate fire management (Factor A); proliferation of nonnative invasive plants, random events, such as hurricanes and storm surges, maintenance practices used on roadsides and disturbed sites, and sea level rise (Factor E); and the inadequacy of existing regulations to reduce these threats (Factor D).

5. What does listing these plants under the ESA mean for them?

Listed plants are not protected from take, although it is illegal to collect or maliciously harm them on federal land, or any lands during the commission of a crime, including trespassing. The plants also are protected from commercial trade. In addition, states may have their own laws restricting activities involving listed plants.

6. Are some plant populations on private land? If so, what does the listing of these four plants mean for a private landowner?

Yes, some of the plants are on private land. Unless the private property owner modifies his property in some way that requires a federal permit or federal funding, there is no impact to the landowner under federal law. However, any local and/or state laws that apply to this plant species would apply.

7. How does the fact that one of these species is found within the Richmond Pine Rockland area of Miami affect the Coral Reef Commons and Miami Wild construction projects?

It is not prohibited by the ESA to destroy, damage or move protected plants unless such activities involve an endangered/threatened species on federal land or if the action occurs 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. At present, only Everglades bully is known to occur within the Richmond Pine Rocklands, while Florida pineland crabgrass was known to occur there historically.

8. Is the Service planning to designate critical habitat for these four plants?

The Service will likely publish a proposed rule designating critical habitat for these plants in the future.

9. What is the Multi-District Litigation (MDL) workplan?

In 2011, in an effort to improve implementation of the ESA, the Service submitted to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, a multi-year listing work plan that will enable the agency to systematically, over a period of six years, review and address the needs of more than 250 species listed in the 2010 Candidate Notice of Review, to determine if they should be added to the federal list of endangered and threatened species. These listings are part of that workplan.