

## LARGE TEAM EFFORT RESULTS IN SUCCESS FOR A SMALL BUTTERFLY



Mardon skipper butterfly

(Photo: Vince Harke, USFWS)

In 2005, a small group of biologists from the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in Oregon and Washington were concerned enough about the survival of a small brown non-descript butterfly, the Mardon skipper, to form an Interagency Work Group (Group). The goal of the Group was to learn about conservation gaps regarding this federal candidate species and to determine what it would take—both in terms of personnel and funding—to address them. The Group evolved over the years to include representation from many other groups including the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and most recently, National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service from California. The Group now addresses key issues across the entire range of the species.

The Interagency work group was productive. Extensive surveys undertaken by the Group discovered significant numbers of new Mardon skipper populations in the Washington Cascades and in coastal areas of California and Oregon. According to Vince Harke, a USFWS biologist and member of the Group, “Some sites we found supported hundreds, even thousands of individual butterflies”.

Harke also noted that the majority of the sites occurred on lands managed by various Federal agencies and that those lands afford the species a high level of protection without imminent risks of habitat loss through development or other impacts.



Working Group surveys for Mardon skipper near Mt. Adams in southwest Washington (Photo: Vince Harke, USFWS)

The butterfly was identified by the USFWS as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1999. At that time, the U.S. Forest Service placed the species on the regional sensitive species list and, by doing so, generated greater interest and funding in locating the species. Other Federal agencies began surveying for the butterfly on their lands. In May 2012, after a year-long review of the best scientific and commercial information about the species, the USFWS determined that the butterfly did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act.

“The number of documented locations of Mardon skippers expanded from less than ten in 1999 to 165 in 2011,” said Ted Thomas, another USFWS biologist working with the team. “We believe this additional documented habitat and the efforts our Federal partners have made to address threats to the species are sufficient to secure the continued existence of the Mardon skipper for the foreseeable future.”

Further, the U.S. Forest Service and BLM, in coordination with the Xerces Society, developed management plans for most southern Oregon sites and implemented extensive restoration actions. Efforts also included production of a range-wide conservation assessment that has research opportunities and management strategies. In addition to creating strong interagency cohesion aimed at species conservation, the work group has used the expertise of many partners, including the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

In March 2012, the U.S. Forest Service recognized the accomplishments of the Interagency Work Group with the prestigious “Wings Across the Americas” award for the conservation of this once-rare butterfly species.