



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
510 Desmond Dr. SE, Suite 102
Lacey, Washington 98503

INFORMATIONAL MEMO

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SUBJECT: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to extend Endangered Species Act protection to the streaked horned lark and the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly and their habitats.

BACKGROUND: The streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*) is a ground-nesting bird found in open, sparsely-vegetated areas on Puget Sound prairies, on sandy islands in the Columbia River and along the Washington coast. Streaked horned larks have declined throughout their range and have been extirpated from British Columbia. Monitoring indicates that the Washington population is declining precipitously and inbreeding is occurring. Streaked horned larks nest and winter in flat, open areas with sparse low-stature vegetation and substantial areas of bare ground and are most often found at airports and on agricultural lands.

The Taylor's checkerspot (*Euphydryas editha taylori*) is a subspecies of the checkerspot butterfly that requires specific larval host plants. They were historically known to occur in British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. Their current distribution has declined from over 80 locations range-wide to just 15 sites in Washington and three sites in Oregon. The checkerspot's habitat is prairies, coastland grasslands and shallow soil balds, and openings within a forested matrix.

Both the streaked horned lark and Taylor's checkerspot butterfly are residents of native prairies and open, sparsely vegetated areas. In Washington, native prairies are the state's fastest-disappearing ecosystem type. Since the mid-1800s over 90 percent of Washington's Puget Prairie habitat has been lost through conversion to human uses such as development or agriculture, or to encroachment of forest or invasive species resulting primarily from fire suppression.

PROPOSAL:

The Service is proposing to list the streaked horned lark as threatened and to designate critical habitat at six locations in the Puget Sound lowlands, four sites along the Washington coast, and 3 islands on the lower Columbia River for a total of 6,262 acres in Washington. These proposed critical habitat units include three training areas and two military airfields (at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Pierce County), two civilian airports (Olympia Airport in Thurston County and Sanderson Field in Mason County), coastal beaches on Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, state, private, and tribal lands in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties and three islands in Wahkiakum and Cowlitz Counties on the Washington side of the Columbia River. Several additional sites are being proposed in Oregon.

The Service is proposing to list the Taylor's checkerspot as endangered and to designate critical habitat at 15 locations in Washington, totaling 6,723 acres. These areas include prairies and training areas on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, in Thurston County, grassland sites and coastal bluffs on Whidbey Island (Island County), and rocky balds on the North Olympic Peninsula (Clallam County). Three small sites are also being proposed in the Willamette Valley of Oregon.

4(D) RULE –SPECIAL RULE: The Service believes that regular mowing and maintenance at airports and many agricultural activities benefit the streaked horned lark by providing the open habitat and low vegetation structure needed by the bird. Thus, we are proposing to promulgate a 4(d) rule that would remove the take prohibitions for specific activities associated with airport maintenance and operation, and certain agricultural activities. The exemption means anyone engaged in those permitted activities would not be held responsible if the activities harm individuals if the species become listed.

If you have questions or need additional information about the Service's proposal, a copy and information about the subspecies involved is available on the USFWS website at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/>. The proposal will be open for public comment for 60 days ending December 10, 2012. Please see the proposal to see how comments may be provided to the Service. The Service may take up to one year following the date of the proposal to make a final determination on the status of the species and their habitats.