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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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News Release



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Service Proposes to Protect Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly under the Endangered Species Act *Agency Seeks Information from the Public, Scientific Community before Making Final Decision*

Current evidence suggests that the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly is in danger of becoming extinct in the foreseeable future, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. As a result, the Service has proposed to protect the species under the Endangered Species Act and is seeking new information from the public and the scientific community that will assist the agency in making a final determination.

The Taylor's checkerspot is a subspecies of Edith's checkerspot butterfly that occupies grassland habitat in Washington and Oregon. The insect's range is limited by its larval dependence on specific host plants.

The Service first identified the Taylor's checkerspot as a candidate for ESA protection in October, 2001, due to the threat posed by loss or degradation of prairie ecosystem and coastal grasslands due to conversion to agriculture, commercial and residential development, dominance by invasive species, and forest encroachment resulting from the lack of periodic fire. The species' historic range has been significantly reduced and it continues to experience habitat loss due to the same threats.

Service biologists have also identified 6,875 acres in western Washington and Oregon that may contain habitat essential to the conservation of the species. Of the total acreage identified, 26 percent is located on state lands, 36 percent on federal lands, 15 percent on county and other lands, and 22 percent on private lands.

The ESA requires the Service to identify the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species, which the Act terms "critical habitat." This identification helps Federal agencies identify actions that may affect listed species or their habitat, and to work with the Service to avoid or minimize those impacts. Identifying this habitat also helps raise awareness of the habitat needs of imperiled species and focus the conservation efforts of other partners such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individual landowners.

Although non-federal lands have initially been included in these areas, activities on these lands are not affected now and will not necessarily be affected if the species is protected under the ESA in the future. Only

if an activity is authorized, funded or carried out by a federal agency will the agency need to work with the Service to help landowners avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts to listed species or their identified habitat.

Today's proposal 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 five years.

The final decision to add the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, as well as the final identification of areas containing habitat essential to the species, will be based on the best scientific information available. In addition, the Service will utilize an economic analysis to inform and refine its identification of this habitat. Only areas that contain habitat essential to the conservation of the species, and where the benefits of this habitat outweigh potential economic impacts, will be included in the final identification.

The Service will open a 60-day public comment period on October 11, 2012 to allow the public to review and comment on the proposal and provide additional information. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties will be considered and addressed in the agency's final listing determination for the species and identification of habitat essential to its conservation.

A copy of today's proposal and other information about the subspecies involved is available at <http://www.ofr.gov/inspection.aspx>. or on the USFWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office website at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/>. Following publication in the Federal Register, links to the document may be found at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse.collection.action?collectionCode=FR>. The proposal is open for public comment for 60 days. Comments may be sent electronically through the Federal eRulemaking portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Submit your comments to Docket No. FWS-R1-ES-2012-0080. You may also submit hard copy comments by U.S. Mail or hand delivery to: Public Comments Processing; Attn: FWS-R1-ES-2012-0080; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS2042-PDM, Arlington, VA 22203. All comments must be received by December 10, 2012.

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