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# News Release



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## **Service Protects Two Plants Under the Endangered Species Act**

*Information from the Public, Scientific Community Informs Final Decision*

The Umtanum desert buckwheat and the White Bluffs bladderpod may become threatened with extinction in the foreseeable future, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. As a result, the Service will protect the species under the Endangered Species Act, and will continue to work with conservation partners to aid the species' recovery and address current and future threats.

The Umtanum desert buckwheat and the White Bluffs bladderpod are species of plants that occupy narrow, linear bands on bluffs above and on opposite sides of the Columbia River along the Hanford Reach in Washington.

The Service first identified the Umtanum desert buckwheat and the White Bluffs bladderpod as candidates for ESA protection in 1999, due to the threat posed by wildfire, competition from non-native plants, increased fuel loads for wildfires caused by non-native plant competition, and small population size. The only known population of Umtanum Desert buckwheat, discovered in 1995, occurs on a wide mountain ridge in Benton County, Washington. Monitoring of the population shows a continuous decline since 1997 and during that time only a handful of seedlings have survived their first year. The only known population of the White Bluff's bladderpod subspecies is found primarily from cliff tops to near-vertical exposures of cemented, highly alkaline, caliche-like soil along a ten-mile strip of bluffs also exclusively on the Hanford Reservation.

Today's announcement also designates critical habitat for each plant: approximately 344 acres for Umtanum Desert buckwheat and approximately 2,861 acres for White Bluffs bladderpod. All of the land designated as critical habitat for the Umtanum Desert buckwheat is federally-owned. Of the 2,861 acres designated as critical habitat for the bladderpod 2,400 are federally-owned. The remainder of the designated critical habitat is a mix of state (42 acres) and private lands (419 acres).

Today's decision 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 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 are included in these areas, activities on these lands will not necessarily be affected. 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 the species or its habitat.

The final decision to add the Umtanum Desert buckwheat and White Bluffs bladderpod to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, as well as the identification of areas containing habitat essential to the species, is based on the best scientific information available. The Service held a 60-day public comment period beginning on May 15, 2012 that allowed the public to review and comment on its proposal and provide additional information. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, and other interested parties was considered and addressed in the agency's final listing determination for the species and identification of habitat essential to its conservation.

In addition, the Service utilized 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, have been included.

More information on this decision is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/>. The decision is available for public review at: [http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/html/FR/todays\\_toc.html](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/html/FR/todays_toc.html). After today the document may be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collection.action?collectionCode=FR>. A copy of the proposed rule, as well as supporting documentation, can be found on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket No. FWS-R1-ES-2013-0012.

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