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# News Release



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## **Streaked Horned Lark, Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly to be Protected under the Endangered Species Act**

*Proactive Habitat Conservation Partnerships Already Benefiting Both Prairie Species*

In a move that will help protect prairie ecosystems, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced it will protect the streaked horned lark and the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The lark will be listed as threatened and the butterfly as endangered. Both are found in Washington and Oregon and one population of the butterfly is also known to exist in British Columbia.

The Service designated 2,900 acres in Washington and 1,729 acres in Oregon as critical habitat for the lark, half of which are Federal lands belonging to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For the butterfly, the Service designated 1,921 acres in Washington and 20 acres in Oregon. Almost 400 of those acres belong to conservation organizations that support the designation as part of their missions.

The Service also announced a special rule to exempt the "take" or harm of streaked horned larks associated with civilian airport maintenance and operation, agriculture management and noxious weed control on non-federal lands. The exemption means anyone engaged in those activities would not be held responsible if the activities harm members of the subspecies.

"The plight of these two subspecies is indicative of the declining status of western and coastal prairie ecosystems," said Robyn Thorson, Director of the agency's Pacific Region. "These ecosystems are a unique part of the Pacific Northwest and are home to many more species than these two. We must do more to protect both the prairies and the wildlife dependent on them."

The streaked horned lark is a subspecies of the horned lark found exclusively in western Washington and Oregon. It is a ground-nesting bird found in open conditions, sparsely vegetated areas in the Willamette Valley and on Puget Sound prairies, on sandy islands in the Columbia River, and along the Washington coast.

The Taylor's checkerspot, a subspecies of Edith's checkerspot butterfly, occupies grassland habitat in Washington and Oregon with one known population in British Columbia. The insect's range is limited by its larval dependence on specific host plants.

The Service has been working with partners for some time to aid both subspecies' recovery and address current and future threats.

“Both subspecies have benefitted greatly from groups working proactively with the Service on habitat,” Thorson said. “Although the lark and butterfly still require protection as threatened and endangered subspecies, this is a great example of how public entities, private groups and landowners can proactively work together for the benefit of wildlife conservation.”

The Service first identified the two subspecies as candidates for ESA protection in October 2001 due to the threat posed by the loss or degradation of prairie ecosystem, coastal habitats and, in the case of the lark, sandy islands. That habitat loss is due to conversion to agriculture, commercial and residential development, dominance by invasive species, and forest encroachment resulting from a variety of causes such as lack of periodic fire. Both subspecies' historic ranges have been significantly reduced and they continue to experience habitat loss due to the same threats.

This 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.

The final decision to add the two subspecies to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants is based on the best scientific information available. Following their initial proposal for protection under the ESA in 2012, the Service held 90-day public comment periods for both subspecies, along with public workshops and hearings 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.

More information on this decision is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/TCBSHL.html>

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