



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PUBLISHES 12-MONTH PETITION FINDING FOR RARE FERN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that the slender moonwort, a small fern that has disappeared from most of its known historical range across five western states and Canada, warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act, but that listing the species under the Act is precluded by the need to first undertake higher priority listing actions.

Slender moonwort is a small perennial fern with pale green leaves two to seven inches long. The plant can live in a variety of habitats such as meadows with tall grass and in forest openings. This species was first described by scientists and given the name slender moonwort in 1994.

"Very few populations of slender moonwort exist today, with a combined total of only about 190 individual plants," said Anne Badgley, regional director of the Service's Pacific Region. "We believe that current scientific information supports listing slender moonwort under the Endangered Species Act, but other higher priority listing actions take precedence."

Slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*) was once found in Idaho (the exact collection site is uncertain, but is believed to be Bonner County or Boundary County), Oregon (Wallowa County), Montana (Glacier and Lake counties), California (Fresno County), and Colorado (Boulder and El Paso counties). The plant also has been documented in Quebec and New Brunswick, Canada. The plant is now believed to be extinct in Idaho and Canada, as well as in Lake County, Montana; Fresno County, California; and Boulder County, Colorado. In some of these places the plant has not been seen since the early 1900s.

Today, only nine sites are known to support slender moonwort. Eastern Oregon has two sites, one in the Eagle Cap Wilderness (Wallowa-Whitman National Forest), and another on private land in Wallowa County. One site exists in the Colville National Forest in Ferry County, Washington. Two populations are located along the Pike's Peak toll road in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest in El Paso County, Colorado. Another population exists near Leadville in Lake County, Colorado. Two sites are found in Glacier National Park in Glacier County, Montana, and another site is south of St. Mary's, Montana, on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. All remaining populations are very small, ranging from two to 100 plants.

Biologists have determined the slender moonwort is threatened by the uncontrolled spread of non-native plants and by ground-disturbing activities such as livestock grazing, urban development, timber harvest, road-building and various types of recreation. Remaining populations of the slender moonwort are so small that a natural disaster such as fire or drought also could destroy them.

Under the Act, citizens may petition the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list species as threatened and endangered. Today's finding is in response to a petition filed by the Biodiversity Legal Foundation in July 1999.

The Service has determined that it is unable to initiate or finalize any new listings in fiscal year 2001 or review any new petitions because court-ordered actions, primarily critical habitat designations, have exhausted its listing budget. However, the Service is able to complete listing actions that were in the final stages of review at the conclusion of the last fiscal year. Today's finding is one of those.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic, and aesthetic values. Plants also play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects, and drought. At least 25 percent of prescription drugs contain ingredients derived from plant compounds, including medicine used to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia, and malaria, as well as that used to assist organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

The Service published the petitioner finding for the plant in today's *Federal Register*. As a result of this finding, the Service will add the slender moonwort to the list of species that are candidates for listing under the Act. Because the slender moonwort is a species that was petitioned for listing, the Act requires the Service to conduct an annual review of its "warranted but precluded" finding. The Service anticipates developing proposed rules for the conservation of candidate species in the future and encourages state and Federal agencies as well as other parties to give consideration to these species in environmental planning.

For further information on slender moonwort (*Botrychium lineare*), contact Robert Ruesink, supervisor, or Steve Duke at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, Idaho 83709 (telephone 208-378-5243).

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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