



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SERVICE EXTENDS ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION TO RARE WESTERN PLANT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today listed the Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), a rare plant found in four western states and Canada, as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. A species is listed as threatened when it is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The Service also determined in its final rule that designation of critical habitat for the plant is prudent. The agency will develop a proposal to designate critical habitat as soon as feasible, considering workload priorities and budgetary capabilities.

Just over half of the known populations of Spalding's catchfly occur on private land, much of which is slated for development, including areas near Redbird Ridge in Idaho, and Wallowa Lake in Oregon.

The Spalding's catchfly is a long-lived perennial herb in the carnation family. It has small greenish-white flowers and foliage covered with sticky hairs. The plant is native to grassland prairie habitats in southeastern Washington, northwestern Montana, and portions of Idaho, Oregon and British Columbia, Canada. The majority of remaining Spalding's catchfly populations are extremely small and isolated, often bordering agricultural fields or rangelands.

The native grassland prairies that are home to the Spalding's catchfly range in elevation from 1,500 to 5,000 feet. This habitat once was widespread in the region but has been reduced by more than 95 percent over the past century, primarily because of conversion to agricultural and urban uses. Fire suppression also has allowed an unnatural increase in woody plants, which overtake catchfly habitat, decreasing its numbers. Currently, there are only 52 locations where the catchfly is found, containing a total of about 16,500 plants.

"Few Spalding's catchfly populations exist today," said Anne Badgley, the Service's regional director for the Pacific Region. "It is our hope that the listing of this plant will encourage public awareness and result in conservation actions by Federal, state and private agencies, groups, and individuals."

Just over half of the known populations of this plant occur on private land, much of which is slated for development, including areas near Redbird Ridge in Idaho, and Wallowa Lake in Oregon. The Service has already begun working with appropriate Federal and state agencies and private landowners to identify and reduce impacts to the catchfly.

The Service will work with the States, local governments, and other partners to develop a recovery plan to address threats to this species, which include livestock grazing and trampling, conversion of prairie into farmland, fire suppression, herbicide spraying and development.

The final listing of the species was delayed when the Service announced in November 2000 that it would be unable to list any new species in Fiscal Year 2001 because virtually its entire listing budget was being used to comply with court orders and settlement agreements, which primarily involved the designation of critical habitat for species already listed under the Act. Last month, the Service announced an agreement with a variety of plaintiffs that would free up funds to list the catchfly and other species.

The Spalding's catchfly is listed as endangered under state law by the State of Oregon and is on the Washington Natural Heritage Program's list of threatened species. Idaho and Montana State Natural Heritage programs also consider the plant to be rare and imperiled.

The Endangered Species Act does not prohibit "take" of listed plants on private lands, but landowners must comply with state laws protecting imperiled plants. Consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are necessary for private and other landowners only when Federal funding or permits are required for activities that may affect listed species.

Native plants are important for their ecological, economic, and aesthetic values. Plants 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 final rule listing Spalding's catchfly as a threatened species was published in today's *Federal Register*. For more information, contact Robert Ruesink at the Snake River Basin Office, (208) 378-5243.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance 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 more than 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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