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Rare Sacramento Mountains Plant Gets Fresh Scrutiny

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that a petition to remove the Sacramento Mountains thistle from the federal list of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants provides substantial information to warrant a full review of the species' conservation status. The thistle grows in the Sacramento Mountains of Otero County, New Mexico.

The purpose of the review is to determine if the Sacramento Mountains thistle warrants continued protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Service is seeking all commercial and scientific information about the Sacramento Mountains thistle including its range, biology, status, habitat needs, and other conservation efforts.

“We know that the thistle population has increased from a low of 20 populations,” said Benjamin N. Tuggle, Regional Director for the Service in the Southwest. “The status review is comprehensive and formally brings in new content that we can use to inform our decision.”

Copies of the notice are available on the internet at www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Library/ or by calling 505-761-4700. Comments and information may be submitted electronically at: www.regulations.gov. Follow the instructions for submitting comments. Additionally, you may submit comments through the U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn:

FWS-R2-ES-2008-0114; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203. The deadline for comments and information is Dec. 22.

The Service is looking for further information that suggests that the thistle's populations are increasing, declining, or stable; whether existing factors affecting the species are increasing, the same, reduced or eliminated; if there are any additional factors affecting the species; whether there are conservation actions affecting the species; and, if new information or analysis calls into question any conclusions in the original listing determination.

The Sacramento Mountains thistle was listed as threatened in 1987. There are presently 74 known sites on the Lincoln National Forest. The thistle grows in wet soils at elevations above 7,500 feet. It is sturdy and tall, between three and six feet in height, and has brilliant purple rosettes and large leaves that span eight inches in width. This plant requires the saturated soils found in wetland/riparian habitats along springs, seeps, and streams. Waters at these sites are rich in calcium carbonate deposits.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

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