Background: Natural habitats form some of the most realistic and sustainable training areas on Department of Defense (DoD) lands. These areas are also some of the best remaining habitat for rare and endangered species. Four species that occur on the grasslands of Joint Base Lewis-McChord are candidates for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Were any of these species listed, significant training restrictions could be imposed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These restrictions could even put military missions in jeopardy.

Federal candidate species occurring on grasslands of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Clockwise from top left: Taylor's checkerspot, Mardon skipper, Mazama pocket gopher, streaked horned lark

Objective: The project's primary objective is to preclude the need for ESA listing of the candidate species that occur on the grasslands of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. The project promotes cooperative ecoregional recovery of these rare species throughout their range in order to share the burden of species recovery over a variety of partners and locations. The ecoregion extends from Oregon's Willamette Valley, through Washington's Puget Trough, and into the Georgia Basin of British Columbia, Canada. Thus, the project moves beyond geographic and political boundaries to engage and work with all organizations and individuals who will assist in the recovery process. The DoD Legacy Program and US Fish & Wildlife Service are funding this effort.

Summary of Approach: The project works under a three-tiered framework. The primary components of the strategy are information transfer, linking of entities, and providing incentives. Efficient information transfer ensures that all partners utilize the best available practices for restoration and recovery actions. The formal and informal linking of entities is important to facilitate production and implementation of ecoregional goals, define roles, and share resources. The final component of the strategy is to provide incentives. The project enhances financial incentives by raising awareness and helping to direct funds towards implementing identified priority actions. Non-financial incentives, such as technical and on-the-ground assistance, are also key to guiding and promoting recovery actions.

Benefit: The regulatory burden of endangered species on training lands is an imminent threat to Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Cooperative, range-wide, ecoregional recovery of these species may be the best strategy to reduce the potential for ESA listing. The ecoregional focus directs efforts throughout the ecological range of the target species, thereby shifting the focus from only the few remaining populations on Department of Defense lands and sharing the recovery burden with partners. With conservation success, ESA listings could be avoided and training flexibility maintained.

Accomplishments: Awareness of rare species needs has significantly increased, available funding for candidate species recovery actions is enhanced, and partners are working together beyond bureaucratic boundaries at unprecedented levels sharing ideas, scientific expertise, and best management practices. In 2010 an ecoregional conference brought together over 250 professionals to explore prairie conservation. Many of the research papers presented will be published in a special edition of Northwest Science, preserving the scientifically significant output of the conference and making it available to the scientific community at large. Over the last 3 years, species-specific working groups throughout the ecoregion have met at least annually to identify obstacles and potential actions for recovery. This has resulted in concrete benefits to the candidate species on the ground, including successful reintroduction of captive reared butterflies, and successful translocations of Mazama pocket gophers.

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