



News Release

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SERVICE PROPOSES TO PROTECT GUADALUPE FESCUE UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Service is Working with National Park Service and Mexico to Conserve West Texas plant

With only two known remaining populations of Guadalupe fescue, one of which is declining, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to list the plant as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (Act). In addition, we are proposing to designate critical habitat for Guadalupe fescue in Big Bend National Park. A 60-day public comment period will begin upon publication of these proposals in the *Federal Register*.

Guadalupe fescue is a short-lived perennial grass species found only in the high mountains of the Chihuahuan Desert in the Trans-Pecos region of Texas and in the State of Coahuila, Mexico. The species has been reported from only six locations, however, only two of these populations remain; one population in the Chisos Mountains within Big Bend National Park, and one population in the Maderas del Carmen Mountains in northern Mexico. Guadalupe fescue is threatened by the scarcity and small size of its populations, and the isolation of its populations from each other, all of which can negatively impact its genetic variation; reduced frequency of wildfires; livestock grazing (direct predation of plants); invasive species; effects of climate change such as higher temperatures and changes in the amount and seasonal pattern of rainfall; fungal infection of seeds; and runoff from trails.

“We greatly appreciate the efforts of the National Park Service and our counterparts in Mexico to protect Guadalupe fescue and the sky island forests that support this unique plant,” said Adam Zerrenner, Field Supervisor, Austin Ecological Services Field Office. “Our continued cooperative conservation efforts with the National Park Service and Mexico are key to maintaining and improving the status of the species both here and in Mexico.”

The Service is currently working with Big Bend National Park and Guadalupe Mountains National Park to implement a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA). The CCA was updated in August 2008 and is a 10-year agreement. It focuses on monitoring and surveys; seed and germ plasm banking; fire and invasive species management; trail management; educating staff and visitors; establishing an advisory team of experts; and cooperation with Mexican agencies and researchers to conserve the known Guadalupe fescue populations and identify new ones.

The Service is also proposing to designate approximately 7,815 acres as critical habitat for the Guadalupe fescue in Brewster County, Texas. The proposed critical habitat is entirely within Big Bend National Park and does not include any private land.

"The proposed listing and designation of critical habitat will help Big Bend National Park work with USFWS to conserve this rare species, and its sky island forest habitat within the Chisos Mountains," stated Superintendent Cindy Ott-Jones, "and we also look forward to collaborating on Guadalupe fescue conservation with our Mexico partners in the Maderas del Carmen protected area."

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve, and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The Service will accept comments received or postmarked by or before November 8, 2016. For more information on these proposals, what to comment on, or how to submit comments, see the *Federal Register* notice on our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas>.

The Endangered Species Act prohibits malicious damage or destruction of threatened or endangered plant in any area under Federal jurisdiction, and the removal, cutting, digging up, or damaging or destroying of any such species on any other area in knowing violation of any State law or regulation, or in the course of any violation of a State criminal trespass law. Listing also focuses attention on the needs of the species, encouraging conservation efforts by other agencies (federal, state and local), conservation groups, and other organizations and individuals.

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 to treat cancer, heart disease, juvenile leukemia, and malaria, and to assist in organ transplants. Plants are also used to develop natural pesticides.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#) and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

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