

## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Service Designates Critical Habitat for Three Endangered Plants

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is designating critical habitat for three endangered plants found in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. This critical habitat designation becomes final on September 25, 2014, 30 days after publication in the *Federal Register*. The plants, which were listed as endangered, on August 1, 2014, are the fleshy-fruit gladeceess, whorled sunflower, and Short's bladderpod.

The Service has identified 2,488 acres in 31 units as habitat critical to the plants' survival.

Short's bladderpod is found in Posey County, Indiana; Clark, Franklin, and Woodford Counties Kentucky; and Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Jackson, Montgomery, Smith, and Trousdale Counties, Tennessee. The whorled sunflower is found in Floyd County, Georgia; Cherokee County, Alabama, and Madison and McNairy Counties, Tennessee. The fleshy-fruit gladeceess is found in Lawrence and Morgan Counties, Alabama.

The Service listed these three plants for protection due to habitat loss caused by road maintenance and construction; development; industrial forestry and agricultural practices; water-level fluctuations in reservoirs; off-road vehicle use; and competition from native and invasive non-native plants. In addition, many of the plants' populations are small, making them less resilient to threats and vulnerable to loss of genetic variation.

All of the 31 critical habitat tracts are occupied by one of the three plant species. About 86 percent of the designated critical habitat is on private land. The remainder is land owned by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and state and local governments. About 926 acres in 20 units in Posey County, Indiana; Clark, Franklin, and Woodford Counties, Kentucky; and Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Jackson, Montgomery, Smith, and Trousdale Counties, Tennessee, are designated as critical habitat for Short's bladderpod. About 1,542 acres in four units in Cherokee County, Alabama; Floyd County, Georgia; and Madison and McNairy Counties, Tennessee, are designated as critical habitat for whorled sunflower. In addition, about 21 acres in seven units in Lawrence and Morgan Counties, Alabama, are designated as critical habitat for fleshy-fruit gladeceess.

The purpose of critical habitat is to identify specific geographic areas that are essential to conserving a federally protected plant or animal. When an area is designated as critical habitat for a listed species, federal agencies are required by law to ensure that any action they fund, authorize or carry out is not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of the

habitat. This is carried out through consultation with the Service. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area. A critical habitat designation also does not allow the government or public to access private lands, nor does it require implementation of restoration, recovery or enhancement measures by non-federal landowners. Although private, local and state government lands have been included in the critical habitat designation for these three plants, activities on those lands would only be impacted if they are authorized, funded or carried out by a federal agency. Activities in designated critical habitat that require federal involvement (for example, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit to build a dam) would need to be reviewed by the Service. The federal agency would work with the Service to help landowners avoid, reduce or offset potential negative impacts to the critical habitat and the listed species.

The Service's identification of critical habitat areas is based on the best scientific information available, and considers all relevant information provided by the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry and other interested parties during the public comment period. The Service offers willing landowners a number of voluntary and non-regulatory conservation programs to help these plants survive as they live and work on their lands.

The Service held two comment periods, August 2, 2013 and May 29, 2014, to allow the public to review and give feedback on our proposal to list these plants and designate critical habitat. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, and other interested parties was considered and addressed in the agency's final critical habitat designation. The decisions to add these plants to the Endangered Species List and designate critical habitat are based on the best scientific information available. For more information, please see <http://www.regulations.gov>, docket number FWS-R4-ES-2013-0086.

The ultimate goal of the ESA is the recovery of these listed plants so that they no longer need protection under the ESA. The next step is to develop recovery plans that provide guidance for the Service and its conservation partners to address threats to the plants' survival and recovery.

Federal landowners must comply with provisions of the ESA to protect these plants on their land. It is unlawful to remove from federal lands plants that are listed as endangered under the ESA, or to import, export, or sell such plants without first consulting with the Service.

Landowners interested in helping the Service recover the Short's bladderpod and the whorled sunflower, or who would like more information about the potential implications of the listing and critical habitat designation, should contact Geoff Call in the Service's Tennessee Field Office at 931-525-4983, or via e-mail at [Geoff\\_Call@fws.gov](mailto:Geoff_Call@fws.gov). For fleshy fruit gladeceess, please contact Shannon Holbrook in the Service's Alabama Field Office at 251-441-5871, or via e-mail at [Shannon\\_Holbrook@fws.gov](mailto:Shannon_Holbrook@fws.gov).

An example of the Service's efforts to work with landowners to conserve species is its partnership with Plum Creek, a land and timber company, to protect the whorled sunflower. In Georgia, Plum Creek has partnered with the Nature Conservancy to cooperatively manage the Coosa Valley Prairie property which protects most of Georgia's population of the sunflower, while allowing for sustainable timber harvesting.

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. For more information, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast](http://www.facebook.com/usfwssoutheast), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast](http://www.twitter.com/usfwssoutheast), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwssoutheast>

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