



Questions and Answers About The Reclassification of the Missouri Bladderpod from Endangered to Threatened

1) What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service doing?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is changing the classification of the Missouri bladderpod (*Lesquerella filiformis*) from endangered to threatened under the Endangered Species Act (Act).

2) What is the Missouri bladderpod?

The Missouri bladderpod is a small annual plant, about 4 to 8 inches tall, with many slender stems that grow from a cluster of leaves at the base of the plant. The stems and leaves of the bladderpod are covered with small hairs that give the plant a silvery look. Distinctive canary yellow flowers cluster at the top of the stems and bloom from April to May. The flowers have four yellow petals and produce round green seedpods (1/8 inch in diameter) that turn brown as they dry. After flowering and seeding the plant dies. Seeds germinate in fall and survive the winter as button-sized rosettes, which look like clusters of leaves on the ground.

3) Where does the Missouri bladderpod live?

The Missouri bladderpod grows only in southwest Missouri and northern Arkansas. Natural habitat for Missouri bladderpods is open limestone glades. Glades are naturally dry, treeless areas with shallow, loose soil and areas of exposed rock. The bladderpod is found on highway rights-of-way and pastures where mowing, grazing, and prescribed fires have kept the area open. Occasionally it is also found in open, rocky woods or dolomite glades.

4) What is the current population of Missouri bladderpod?

Current population estimates may be as high as 500,000 plants at 63 sites in 6 counties (Christian, Dade, Greene, and Lawrence counties in southwestern Missouri and IZARD and Washington Counties, Arkansas) when climate and soil conditions are ideal for seed germination and the establishment of seedlings.

5) When was the Missouri bladderpod listed as an endangered species?

The final rule listing *Lesquerella filiformis* as an endangered species was published in the Federal Register on January 8, 1987. This listing became effective on February 9, 1987. Progress toward recovery prompted the Service to reclassify the Missouri bladderpod from endangered to threatened on October 15, 2003.

6) Why was the Missouri bladderpod originally listed?

At the time the Missouri bladderpod was listed as an endangered species, there were approximately 11,000 plants at 9 known sites, and only a couple of these sites were protected. Portions of the natural habitat of the Missouri bladderpod were threatened with residential development or overgrazing of pastures by livestock. Other populations found on roadsides were threatened by herbicides or mowing.

Historically, natural disturbances such as fire kept Missouri bladderpod habitat open and free of trees and shrubs. With aggressive control and prevention of wild fires, woody plants and introduced grasses have invaded glades. Missouri bladderpod can only grow in open areas, it

cannot compete with those plants. It is overtaken when glades are invaded by red cedar, cheat grass, and fescue.

7) Why is the Service changing the status of the Missouri bladderpod?

The change from endangered to threatened indicates the Missouri bladderpod is responding well to recovery efforts and is benefiting from the protections and management focus provided by the Endangered Species Act. “Threatened” is a more accurate indication of the species’ current status than “endangered.”

8) What is the difference between an endangered and a threatened plant?

The definitions of endangered and threatened are:

Endangered: Any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Threatened: Any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Under the Act, the protections that are provided to a threatened plant are only slightly different from those provided to an endangered plant. In general, conservation measures provided to an endangered or threatened plant include recognition, recovery actions, requirement for Federal protection, and prohibitions against certain practices. Under the Act, no one may import, export, transport in interstate or foreign commerce in the course of commercial activity, sell or offer for sale in interstate or foreign commerce, or remove from areas under Federal jurisdiction any threatened or endangered plant. For threatened plants, seeds from cultivated specimens are exempt from these prohibitions provided their containers are marked “Of Cultivated Origin.” Additional exemptions for threatened plants may apply to agents of the Service and State conservation agencies working toward the recovery of the species.

9) What is being done to protect the Missouri bladderpod?

The progress toward recovery of the Missouri bladderpod is attributable to the coordinated efforts of Federal and State agencies, private organizations, and local landowners. Protection efforts that are ongoing include:

- Completion of the Missouri Bladderpod Recovery Plan in 1988, and implementation of its recovery recommendations.
- Researching the ecological needs and life history requirements of Missouri bladderpod.
- Purchase of sites by conservation organizations and government agencies to ensure protection.
- Working with private landowners to explain the habitat needs of the Missouri bladderpod and to help landowners manage their glades.
- Providing public outreach materials (e.g. Best Management Practices) that have information on the species and its conservation needs.
- Managing known bladderpod sites by prescribed fire, chain sawing, and the use of herbicides to control woody vegetation and invasive exotic plants (herbicide use is restricted to June through August), rerouting hiking trails to reduce foot traffic impacts, and fencing to keep cattle from bladderpod habitat.
- Surveying potential bladderpod habitat to locate additional populations.

10) What is meant by “recovery,” “reclassification” and “delisting?”

Recovery is the goal of the Act. Under the recovery process, a species is managed and protected so that its population(s) can increase and expand and/or the factors threatening it can be significantly reduced. When a species has been “recovered” it means the species’ population is strong enough that protection under the Act is no longer needed.

Reclassification is a process of changing the status of a listed species from endangered to threatened or vice versa. Under this formal rule making process, a proposal to reclassify is published in the Federal Register, followed by a public comment period. Information received during the public comment period is then evaluated and a determination on whether to reclassify is made and published.

Delisting is taking a species off the list of threatened and endangered species when the population has recovered. Under this formal rule making process, a proposal to delist is published in the Federal Register, followed by a public comment period. The information received during the public comment period is reviewed, a decision is made regarding whether to delist, and the decision is published in the Federal Register. Species are also delisted if they become extinct or were originally listed in error (e.g. information comes to light indicating that the species is much more common than previously believed).

11) Why is the Service reclassifying and not delisting the bladderpod?

Although significant progress has been made toward the recovery of the Missouri bladderpod, there is still work to be done before we can consider the plant recovered and remove it from the Act’s protections. For example, the bladderpod was only recently discovered in Arkansas, indicating that more extensive surveying should be conducted. Also, the long-term success of management techniques, such as prescribed fire, has yet to be evaluated.

Additionally, the delisting criteria outlined in the Missouri Bladderpod Recovery Plan (1988) have not yet been achieved. These criteria state that, to be considered for delisting, 30 self-sustaining populations must be protected and managed. Of those, 15 must be in secure ownership, occupy a minimum of one-half acre of habitat each, and show self-sustaining populations for at least 7 years. Currently there are 63 self-sustaining populations, but only 9 are under secure ownership.

12) How many other species have been reclassified from endangered to threatened?

The Service has reclassified 17 species in the United States from endangered to threatened, including 6 plants and 11 animals. Several other species are currently proposed for reclassification.

13) When will the reclassification become effective?

The reclassification will become effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

14) How do I get more information?

Contact Paul McKenzie, Endangered Species Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 608 E. Cherry St., Room 200, Columbia, Missouri 65201-7712; by phone at 573/876-1911 ext. 107; or by electronic mail at Paul_McKenzie@fws.gov. Also, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Region 3 website at <http://midwest.fws.gov/endangered>. Individuals who are hearing-impaired or speech-impaired may call the Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8337 for TTY assistance.