

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
Hidden Valley Road  
Carlsbad, California 92009  
Phone: 760/431-9440  
Fax: 760/431-9624

# News Release



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Contact: Jane Hendron - 760/431-9440

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## **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TO INITIATE A STATUS REVIEW OF PEIRSON'S MILK-VETCH**

### **Petition to Remove Plant from Endangered Species List Provides Substantial Information**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today that a petition to remove Endangered Species Act protections for the threatened Peirson's milk-vetch provides substantial information indicating such action may be warranted. The Service will initiate a status review for Peirson's milk vetch, a desert plant found only in portions of the Algodones Dunes in Imperial County, California, to determine whether the plant should be proposed for delisting.

Peirson's milk-vetch (*Astragalus magdalena* var. *peirsonii*) was listed as a threatened species under the Act on October 6, 1998. The Service received the delisting petition in October 2001 from the American Sand Association, San Diego Off-Road Coalition, and the Off-Road Business Association.

The petitioners cited several reasons why the plant should be delisted including the data used to list the species were in error, the availability of new information indicates healthy populations of the plant are found throughout the Algodones Dunes, and the listing did not take into account conservation measures associated with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act.

The petition provided information based on plant surveys on a portion of the Algodones Dunes and assumptions about the extent of the seed bank. The Service believes it is appropriate to consider this information, and any other new information available about this species and the threats it may face, in a status review.

"To help ensure the review is comprehensive, we are soliciting information and data regarding this species," said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service's California/Nevada Operations Office.

With today's announcement, the Service is initiating a review of the status of Peirson's milk-vetch. Under the terms of a settlement agreement with the American Sand Association, et al, this review

must be completed by May 31, 2004. The Service is asking the public for any new information about the status and distribution of Peirson's milk-vetch to determine if delisting of the plant is warranted.

Today's finding does not affect other ongoing Service activities related to the protection and management of the Peirson's milk-vetch, nor does it constitute a decision to delist the plant species.

Peirson's milk-vetch, a member of the pea family, grows from 8 inches to 27 inches tall and has pale purple flowers. The plant is found only in portions of the Algodones Dunes, a sand dune formation that is about 40 miles long, running from the northwest to the southeast, and approximately 5-8 miles wide. Within the dunes, the plant is found in scattered occurrences based on the slope of the dunes, patterns of annual rainfall, and other habitat factors. The Service listed Peirson's milk-vetch as a threatened species due to habitat degradation, impacts associated with off-road vehicles, and the inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms to conserve the plant.

The Algodones Dunes is managed by the Bureau of Land Management and includes some of the most heavily used off-road vehicle recreation areas in the United States. In April 2003, the Service completed a consultation with the BLM regarding its Draft Recreation Area Management Plan for the Algodones Dunes. In accordance with the consultation, BLM will initiate intensive monitoring of Peirson's milk-vetch populations to determine impacts to the plant associated with off-road and other recreation activities there. Based on results of a 4-year monitoring effort, BLM may undertake additional management actions to ensure the long-term survival of the plant in its dune habitat.

The 90-day finding on the petition to delist Peirson's milk-vetch was published in the Federal Register on September 5, 2003. Comments and information regarding the status of the plant will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on November 4, 2003 and should be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA 92009.

The Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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