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MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION SUBJECT OF CITIZENS' LAWSUIT
Bush administration violates federal law by ignoring endangered species habitat conservation.
Critical Habitat will protect six endangered plants from extinction and promote their recovery.

Contact: Daniel R. Patterson, Ecologist, Center for Biological Diversity, 951.659.6053 x306 or 520.906.2159 cel
Dr. Emily Roberson, Senior Policy Analyst, California Native Plant Society, 415.970.0394

RIVERSIDE – To protect rare southern California plants from extinction and promote their recovery, the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Native Plant Society filed a lawsuit today to compel the Bush administration to follow federal law and designate critical habitat for six extremely rare plant species found in the San Bernardino, San Jacinto, Laguna, and Palomar mountains of San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego Counties. These plants are threatened with habitat loss and destruction from off-road vehicles, livestock grazing & trampling, urban sprawl, mining, non-native invasive weeds, and other factors. The plants are all listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as threatened or endangered.

“The Bush administration’s illegal disregard for the Endangered Species Act puts these unique plants at risk of extinction and impedes their recovery. As these plants suffer so does other wildlife and our quality of life,” said Daniel R. Patterson, Ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. “Critical habitat is essential for species recovery, which is what the public wants and the clear intention of the law.” He adds, “Critical habitat works. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s own records show that species with protected critical habitat are less likely to be declining, and twice as likely to be recovering, than those without.”

Three of the threatened wildflowers, southern mountain wild buckwheat, Big Bear Valley sandwort, and ash-gray Indian paintbrush live only on pebble plains habitat between 6,000 – 7,500 feet elevation in the San Bernardino Mountains. Pebble plains are fragile remnants of a Pleistocene lake bed, characteristically treeless openings within the surrounding montane pinyon-juniper woodland and coniferous forest. They are found nowhere else on Earth.

San Bernardino bluegrass and California dandelion live in meadow areas of the San Bernardino Mountains, with the dandelion also found in seven meadow areas in San Diego County.

Hidden Lake bluecurls live only in near a single vernal pool in the San Jacinto Mountains.

Citizens have called upon the Bush administration to protect and restore occupied and potential habitat for rare species in the current revision of management plans for the National Forests where the plants live. Ignoring the public, the Bush Forest Service’s draft plan proposes drastic increases in off-road vehicles and other activities that would harm the plants.

“CNPS objective is to use the Endangered Species Act as it was intended by Congress to protect these exceptional ecosystems and recover the imperiled and beautiful wildflowers that depend on them,” said Dr. Emily Roberson, Senior Policy Analyst of CNPS.

“Congress put critical habitat in the ESA specifically to promote recovery of species so that they would no longer need to be listed,” said CNPS Southern California Botanist Ilene Anderson. “We share this goal and wish that litigation was not needed for the law to be followed as written.”

Critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act is defined as “areas essential for survival and recovery of a species.” Critical habitat adds important protection for endangered species beyond listing. Under the Endangered Species Act, federal agencies are barred from granting permits, funding or authorizing activities that would adversely modify critical habitat areas.

Species details (Source: USFS, Southern California Mountains and Foothills Assessment, Dec. 1999): *Arenaria ursina*, (Big Bear Valley sandwort)

Known to live in Big Bear and Holcomb valleys, San Bernardino Mountains. Threats: Vandalism of protective fences; off-road vehicles – recreational and to access unauthorized woodcutting areas; Forest Service system roads bisecting habitat sites on the San Bernardino National Forest; lack of protection on private lands.

Castilleja cinerea, (ash-gray Indian paintbrush)

Known to live on clay soils, pebble plains, in dry meadows, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and Mojavean desert scrub. Known range in San Bernardino Mountains between Snow Valley and Fish Camp, east to Onyx Peak, and from South Fork Meadows in the south to Holcomb Valley in the north. Threats: Erosion control projects; recreational impacts; vacation homes.

Eriogonum kennedyi var. *austromontanum*, (southern mountain buckwheat)

Known to occur in Big Bear and Holcomb Valleys, San Bernardino Mountains. Threats: Roads and off-road vehicles. Host plant for hemi-parasitic *Castilleja cinerea*, and San Bernardino blue butterfly.

Poa atropurpurea, (San Bernardino bluegrass)

Known to live on the edges of wet meadows where there is less competition from more mesic species in the San Bernardino (Holcomb Valley, Wildhorse Meadow), Palomar (Mendenhall Valley), and Laguna Mountains (Laguna Meadow and Bear Valley SW of Lagunas). Threats: Livestock grazing; recreational mining; off-road vehicles; lack of protection on private lands; invasive weeds and genetic pollution.

Taraxacum californicum, (California dandelion)

Known to live on the edges of meadows in the Big Bear and Holcomb Valleys to South Fork Meadows in the Santa Ana River watershed, San Bernardino Mountains. Threats: Intensive recreation; off-road vehicles; livestock; mining; invasive weeds and genetic pollution. It is California’s only native dandelion.

Trichostema austromontanum spp. *compactum*, (Hidden Lake bluecurls)

Known to live at only one high elevation vernal pool in the San Jacinto Mountains. Threats: Livestock use in Long Valley and near Hidden Lake which can trample plants and spread invasive weeds.