

## NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Mountain-Prairie Region  
134 Union Boulevard  
Lakewood, Colorado 80228**

For Release on July 26, 2011

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**Final Rule to list the Pagosa skyrocket (*Ipomopsis polyantha*) as an Endangered Species,  
the Parachute beardtongue (*Penstemon debilis*) and DeBeque phacelia (*Phacelia submutica*)  
as Threatened Species, and  
Proposed Designation of Critical Habitat for the Three Species**

***Public Comments Regarding the Proposed Critical Habitat Accepted Until September 26, 2011***

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today a final rule to list the Pagosa skyrocket (*Ipomopsis polyantha*) as endangered and Parachute beardtongue (*Penstemon debilis*) and DeBeque phacelia (*Phacelia submutica*) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This rule implements the Federal protections provided by the ESA for these three western Colorado plant species. Concurrently, we are proposing to designate 54,036 acres as critical habitat for these three species.

**Pagosa skyrocket** is a rare biennial plant known from only two populations near Pagosa Springs in Archuleta County, Colorado. Highly restricted soil requirements and geographic range make it particularly susceptible to extinction, primarily due to commercial, municipal, and residential development and the road and utility improvements associated with this development. Other threats include heavy livestock use, fragmentation of habitat, and prolonged drought. About 87 percent of the species' occupied habitat is on private land where no regulatory mechanisms exist to protect them from the threats.

We are proposing to designate 9,894 acres of critical habitat for the Pagosa skyrocket in four units with 21 percent of the ownership Federal and the remaining largely on private lands. Two of these units are almost entirely on private lands and are currently occupied by the plant. Two of these units are entirely on U.S. Forest Service lands, are not currently occupied, and are included for future introductions.

**Parachute beardtongue**, also known as Parachute penstemon, is an extremely rare plant that only grows on the oil shale outcrops of the Roan Plateau in Garfield County, Colorado. About 4,133 plants are known to exist. Oxy USA Inc. (OXY) owns land that contains about 69 percent of the total plants on 48 percent of the occupied habitat. The OXY property is designated as a Colorado State Natural Area, managed under a voluntary conservation agreement to protect the plants and habitat. BLM manages about 19 percent of the total plants on 39 percent of the

occupied habitat. The remaining 12 percent of the plants and 13 percent of the habitat are on oil company land without conservation agreements. Threats to the species and its habitat include energy development, oil shale mine reclamation, road maintenance, inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms, and stochastic events. The species' entire range is within the southern part of the Piceance Basin, one of the largest natural gas reserves in North America.

We are proposing to designate 19,155 acres of critical habitat for Parachute beardtongue in four units with 73 percent of the ownership Federal and the remaining largely on private lands. Two of these units are occupied and two of these units are currently unoccupied, and are included for future introductions. We are also considering the two areas designated as Colorado State Natural Areas for exclusions from critical habitat because of the conservation practices in place on these private properties.

**DeBeque phacelia** is a rare, short-lived annual plant that grows on barren patches of shrink-swell clay of the Wasatch Formation. Eight populations that include 22 occurrences on 626 acres of habitat are known in the southern Piceance Basin oil and gas fields of Mesa and Garfield Counties, western Colorado. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 80 percent of the occupied habitat, 12 percent is in private ownership, and the remaining habitat is managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

The species is threatened by habitat modifications from natural gas exploration and production with associated expansion of pipelines, roads, and utilities; development within the Westwide Energy Corridor; increased access to the habitat by off-road vehicles; soil and seed disturbance by livestock and other disturbances; and the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

We are proposing to designate 24,987 acres of critical habitat for DeBeque phacelia in nine units with 87 percent of the area on Federal lands. All of these nine units are currently occupied.

The listing of the three plants will affect the Federal lands where they occur because the ESA directs Federal agencies to protect and promote the recovery of Federally listed species. As a result, Federal lands provide the greatest protection for endangered and threatened plants. Where listed plants occur, or within critical habitat on Federal lands, consultation with the Service is required when projects or activities may affect the species.

However, this listing and proposed critical habitat designation does not directly affect private and non-Federal landowners whose properties host any of the three listed plants. Consultations come into play on these private lands only in cases where activities involving plants require Federal funding or permitting or the use of an Environmental Protection Agency-registered pesticide. Colorado does not have any laws that protect these species. However, it does prohibit deliberate destruction or removal of listed endangered plants from private property in violation of the Colorado state criminal trespass law. Landowners who may have these plants on their property are encouraged to contact the Western Colorado Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for further guidance.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat for the plants will be accepted until September 26, 2011 and may be submitted online at <http://regulations.gov> or U.S. mail or hand delivery: Public

Comments Processing, Attn: (R6-ES-2011-0040); Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

A copy of the final rule, proposed critical habitat, and other information about Pagosa skyrocket, Parachute beardtongue, and DeBeque phacelia are available on the internet at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/plants/3COplants>, or by contacting the Western Colorado Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 764 Horizon Drive, Building B, Grand Junction, CO 81506-3946, phone 970-243-2778. The final rule and proposed critical habitat are published separately in the final and proposed sections of today's Federal Register. Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions concerning this final rule to the above address.

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.

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. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>