

STATE: Recently discovered plant to be considered for federal protection

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ‐ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proceeding with a full review of a rare San Francisco plant, thought extinct in the wild until 10 months ago, for possible listing under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

In its initial review of a petition to protect the Franciscan Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos franciscana*), the service determined that there is sufficient information to conduct a more detailed examination.

At the end of a more exhaustive thorough status review, commonly termed a 12-month review, the service will decide whether to protect the species under the ESA.

Monday's announcement opens a 60-day public comment period, which closes Oct. 12. The service encourages submission of any relevant scientific and commercial data regarding this species. Useful information for the review includes biological information, genetics, habitat needs, historic and current range and populations, habitat and conservation measures.

The plant first had been discussed for protection in 1976, but was not listed at that time because it was thought to be extinct in the wild since 1947.

That changed in October 2009, in a most improbable manner.

A botanist driving south from the Golden Gate Bridge spotted a plant in the gore point of the 19th Avenue exit from Doyle Drive. He thought it might be the Franciscan Manzanita. The plant had been uncovered during vegetation clearing for the Doyle Drive reconstruction project.

The chance discovery led to a three-month effort by Caltrans, the Presidio Trust, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game to save the plant.

In December 2009 they completed an agreement that resulted in moving the plant to a new location last January. Biologists also took cuttings and planted seeds as part of a comprehensive agreement to save the unique plant.

The wild plant, with its 11-ton rootball, was moved on Jan. 23. Monitoring indicates it is doing well so far. Cuttings and seeds taken from the single wild plant also are growing.

Specimens and cuttings from at least three of the last wild plants have been raised in herbariums since 1947. Cultivars have become available in commercial trade.

A petition to list the manzanita on emergency basis was submitted to the service by the Wild Equity Institute, California Native Plant Society and Center for Biological Diversity in mid-December 2009.

By then a cooperative conservation plan had been developed and an agreement to move and protect the plant was completed. Petitioners were advised in January that an emergency listing was not warranted, but that the Service would proceed with a normal review process.

Monday's notice in the Federal Register is the first step in a standard review process of a petition to protect a species under the ESA.

The threshold for a positive 90-day petition finding is "that amount of information that would lead a reasonable person to believe that the measure proposed in the petition may be warranted."

Based on the status review, the service will complete a 12-month finding on the petition, which will address whether the petitioned action is warranted, as provided in section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Act.

Information should be submitted by one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the box that reads "Enter Keyword or ID," enter the Docket number for this finding, which is "[FWS-R8-ES-2010-0049]". Check the box that reads "Open for Comment/Submission," then click the Search button and find the icon that reads "Submit a Comment." Find the correct rulemaking before submitting comments.

- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: Public Comments Processing, Attn: [FWS-R8-ES-2010-0049]; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The service will post all information received on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means posting any personal information included in the submission (see the request for information section on the site for more details).

The Federal Register notice can be found at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>.

Additional information on the species can be found at www.fws.gov/ea/news_releases/2010_News_Releases/NR--Franciscan_Manzanita_+90-day_finding--2010.htm.

For information on how the species came to be discovered can be found at www.fws.gov/arsnew/regmap.cfm?arskey=27687.

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