

Press Release:

For Immediate Release March 7, 2006

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VERNAL POOL RECOVERY PLAN COMPLETED

Chico, CA – The final Recovery Plan for Vernal Pool Ecosystems of California and Southern Oregon (Recovery Plan) has been released today. The Recovery Plan includes goals, priorities, and implementation measures for 33 vernal pool habitat dependent species. It is also one more successful result from litigation initiated by Butte Environmental Council (BEC) in April 2000 as well as the dedication to this task by key personnel at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“We are hopeful that this Recovery Plan will serve as beacon to guide recovery strategies that are as successful as those implemented for our national symbol, the bald eagle,” stated Barbara Vlamis, executive director of Butte Environmental Council. “Collaborative efforts are already underway to protect vernal pool grasslands through the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition with landowners, agencies, and environmental organizations, if only Congress and the legislatures in California and Oregon will add their commitment to the effort,” she continued.

This Recovery Plan provides economy of scale by seeking protection of sizeable acreage that houses multiple species while also providing additional societal and ecological benefits such as water quality, storm water detention, grazing, tourism, and additional species not covered (p. I-1). The mapping in the Recovery Plan provides a comprehensive view of the landscape that should guide statewide and local conservation planning efforts. One conclusion held by BEC that diverges significantly with the Recovery Plan is that if recovery is to occur, the mapped priority areas of the vernal pool species must not only be protected, they must be expanded. Vernal pools are unique depressional wetlands that fill and dry every year. The 33 species are endangered, threatened, and of concern due to the severity of vernal pool destruction in California and Oregon. As the vernal pool critical habitat rules have indicated, Holland estimates that close to 75% of the Central Valley’s vernal pool habitat was lost by 1997; the central coast has lost at a minimum 90%; southern California’s losses exceed 95%; and Oregon has had 60% destroyed with 18% of the extant habitat considered intact (2002). More recent estimates place the habitat losses at over 90% throughout the historic range of vernal pools (Wright 2002).

In closing, Vlamis emphasized that, “Serious and rapid implementation of the Recovery Plan will be most favorable for the 33 vernal pool species, which, ultimately, benefits society as whole.”

More information may be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/sacramento> and http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/fr-cont.html.

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Background

A January 14, 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ruling by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals affirming the protection of four federally listed fresh water crustaceans under the Endangered Species Act. The species were listed under the Endangered Species Act by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in September 1994. The California Building Industry Association sued to try to reverse the species' protection in 1995. Two California organizations, the Butte Environmental Council (BEC) and the Environmental Defense Center of Santa Barbara, supported the listings as interveners all the way to the Supreme Court.

Judge Paul Friedman of the U.S. District Court of Columbia issued the initial ruling on July 29, 1997 that rejected the BIA request to de-list the shrimp, but his decision supported their petition requiring the Service to designate critical habitat for the shrimp species. When the Service failed to respond to the court's direction, BEC sued on April 12, 2000 for critical habitat designation for the four crustaceans. On February 9, 2001, the District Court for the eastern district of California ordered the Service to complete a final critical habitat designation for the crustaceans. The Service requested an extension of one year past the court ordered deadline and BEC concurred when the negotiations created a more comprehensive benefit for the habitat by including 11 vernal pool plant species. When the Service missed another deadline, production of the Recovery Plan was part of the settlement agreement sanctioned by the court.

Species Included in the Recovery Plan for Vernal Pool Ecosystems of California and Southern Oregon

Loch Lomond button-celery	<i>Eryngium constancei</i>	E
Contra Costa goldfields	<i>Lasthenia conjugens</i>	E
Butte County meadowfoam	<i>Limnanthes floccosa ssp. californica</i>	E
few-flowered navarretia	<i>Navarretia leucocephala ssp. pauciflora</i>	E
many-flowered navarretia	<i>Navarretia leucocephala ssp. plieantha</i>	E
hairy Orcutt grass	<i>Orcuttia pilosa</i>	E
Sacramento Orcutt grass	<i>Orcuttia viscida</i>	E
Lake County stonecrop	<i>Parvisedum leiocarpum</i>	E
Greene's tuctoria	<i>Tuctoria greenei</i>	E
Solano grass	<i>Tuctoria mucronata</i>	E
fleshy owl's clover	<i>Castilleja campestris ssp. succulenta</i>	T
Hoover's spurge	<i>Chamaesyce hooveri</i>	T
Colusa grass	<i>Neostapfia colusana</i>	T
San Joaquin Valley Orcutt grass	<i>Orcuttia inaequalis</i>	T
slender Orcutt grass	<i>Orcuttia tenuis</i>	T
Conservancy fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta conservatio</i>	E
longhorn fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta longiantenna</i>	E
vernal pool tadpole shrimp	<i>Lepidurus packardi</i>	E
vernal pool fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta lynchi</i>	T
delta green ground beetle	<i>Elaphrus viridis</i>	T
Ferris' milk vetch	<i>Astragalus tener var. ferrisiae</i>	SC
alkali milk vetch	<i>Astragalus tener var. tener</i>	SC
persistent-fruited saltscallion	<i>Atriplex persistens</i>	SC
spiny-sepaled button-celery	<i>Eryngium spinosepalum</i>	SC

Boggs Lake hedge-hyssop	<i>Gratiola heterosepala</i>	SC
Ahart's dwarf rush	<i>Juncus leiospermus var. ahartii</i>	SC
legenere	<i>Legenere limosa</i>	SC
little mouse tail	<i>Myosurus minimus var. apus</i>	SC
pincushion navarretia	<i>Navarretia myersii ssp. deminuta</i>	SC
bearded popcorn flower	<i>Plagiobothrys hystriculus</i>	SC
mid-valley fairy shrimp	<i>Branchinecta mesovallensis</i>	SC
California fairy shrimp	<i>Linderiella occidentalis</i>	SC
western spadefoot toad	<i>Spea hammondii</i>	SC

(Federal Register November 18, 2004 (Volume 69, Number 222)).