

LOCAL NEWS

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SCOTTS VALLEY

Protection sought for rare herb

Endangered species
Polygonum hickmanii grows in just two spots

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A tiny herb that grows only in Scotts Valley is the most recent poster plant for the Endangered Species Act.

The 2-inch-tall Scotts Valley polygonum (*Polygonum hickmanii*) was proposed for federal protection Thursday by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

There are only 11 known colonies growing in two spots about a mile away from each other in the northern end of Scotts Valley. All are on pri-

vate property.

One spot is north of Casa Way just outside a preserve next to the Scotts Valley High School.

The other is at the Polo Ranch site on land where 40 homes are proposed to be built.

Conservation efforts were included as part of the development agreement for the high school and are expected to be included in the Polo Ranch development, according to information published in the federal register.

The native herb was discovered in 1993 by Santa Cruz biologist Randy Morgan. Morgan

was surveying plants in the Glenwood Meadow horse pasture which, at the time, was proposed to be developed with housing and a golf course.

Morgan later found the plant at the former Santa's Village-Polo Ranch, also in northern Scotts Valley.

Morgan named the plant after J.C. Hickman, the late editor of a reference manual on plant species.

A member of the buckwheat family, Scotts Valley polygonum is an annual herb that grows one to two inches tall and flowers with a single white bloom in late May to August.

The rare herb apparently likes to keep company with the equally rare Scotts Valley spine-

flower, which has already been given federal protection.

The agency said the plant faces threats and perhaps extinction from urban development, trampling by people, pets, bicycles and off-road vehicles and changes in water conditions, soil disturbance and random natural events such as fire or floods.

The Glenwood colony is also threatened by Scotch broom, an invasive species that has invaded to within a few feet of one of the colonies.

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