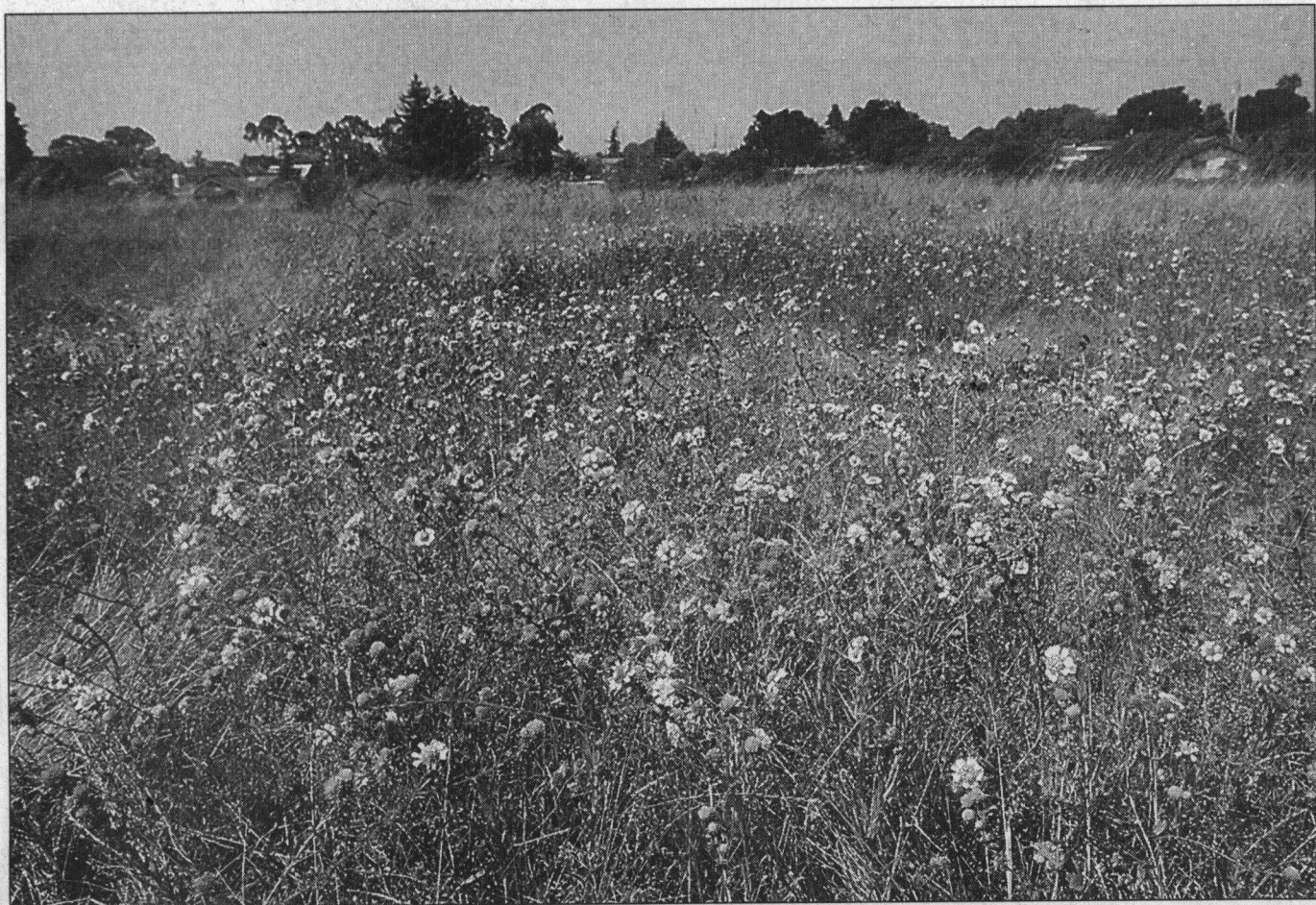


Return of the native



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

The endangered Santa Cruz tarplant is doing just fine in Arana Gulch where its numbers have increased ten-fold.

Tarplant makes comeback at Arana Gulch

By **BRIAN SEALS**
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About 10,000 yellow-flowered Santa Cruz tarplants are basking in the summer sun at Arana Gulch.

Don't call it a comeback. They've been around for years.

Just not in this kind of volume, at least for a while.

SANTA CRUZ

The number of the rare plant represents encouraging news to people like Kirk Lenington, the city's resource ecologist.

"In one year we went from 500 to 10,000 plants," Lenington said. "We had no idea we would be this successful."

That's important because there aren't many of the coastal flowers left. The tarplant is considered endangered by the state and threatened by the federal government. The flower grows to about 2 feet tall and is known for its yellow flowers that bloom in late summer.

There are only about a dozen spots in the world where the tarplant is found. Most are in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties with one habitat in Contra Costa County, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The city last year, armed with about \$10,000 in grant money, began experimenting on how best to manage the rare flower at Arana Gulch, including mowing, burning and scraping the ground of other vegetation to give the tarplant room to grow.

The scraping method produced the best results, but Lenington said he wants to see

results for a few more years. That method isn't doable every year as it also scrapes away nutrients.

Which method to choose from was not a problem for about 200 years, as the site was a dairy farm and the tarplant thrived. As recently as the late '80s, more than 100,000 tarplants were recorded on the site on the city's eastern border.

When cattle stopped grazing, though, the tarplant's numbers plummeted. Invasive, non-native grasses that had previously been eaten by cows grew unfettered, crowding out the flower.

After the city acquired the property in 1994, efforts aimed at restoring the plant brought the tarplant's number to about 35,000 by 1997. Since then, tarplant management had slowed until the city received the grant.

The federal government gave the plant protective status in March 2000 after a lawsuit seeking protection for it and nine other plant species was filed by the Berkeley-based Center for Biological Diversity.

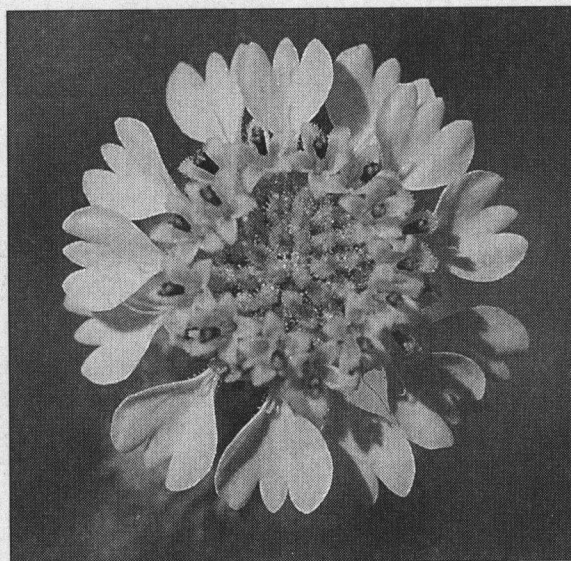
Even before gaining that status, the plant had forced some retooling on area projects, such as Watsonville Airport.

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Santa Cruz tarplant

Holocarpha macradenia

- Upright annual plant that grows a maximum of 2 feet and produces a sticky resin.
- The rare tarplant is found in only a dozen places in the world.
- Federal government gave plant protective status in March 2000.



This Santa Cruz tarplant flower is an inch across. About 10,000 of the rare yellow-flowered plant are reportedly growing at Arana Gulch.