

U.S. seeking protection for grasshopper

Endangered Species
Santa Cruz County land would be designated 'critical habitat'

BY LEE QUARNSTROM
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Federal wildlife officials are proposing the designation of more than 10,000 acres in rural Santa Cruz County as the "critical habitat" of a rare and endangered grasshopper.

The land — mostly privately owned sandy hills between the San Lorenzo Valley communities of Felton and Ben Lomond and the city of Scotts Valley and nearby Mount Hermon — is home to the Zayante band-winged grasshopper, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The bug is a small, pale gray grasshopper with dark bands on its front wing, pale yellow hind wings and blue lower legs, according to the federal agency. It was listed as an endangered species about three years ago.

Sand mining, urban development and recreational ac-
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Sand mining, urban development and recreation are destroying the insect's habitat.

U.S. wants to pinpoint habitat for rare insect

■ GRASSHOPPER

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tivities are destroying the grasshopper's habitat, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The species also has declined because non-native plants have encroached on its preferred habitat of sparsely vegetated, sandy areas in ponderosa pine forests.

About 40 percent of the grasshopper's habitat has been lost, said Lois Grunwald, spokeswoman for the Fish and Wildlife Service. The insect was observed at 10 of 39 potential habitat sites when studies were made from 1989 to 1994, she said.

"This rare grasshopper was only discovered and described by biologists in 1984," said Michael J. Spear, manager of the Fish and Wildlife Service's California and Nevada Operations office. "And because its habitat is being lost at an alarming rate, it now faces extinction."

"As an endangered species, the grasshopper already is protected ... wherever it occurs. The critical habitat designation will help inform both the public and other federal agencies."

Fish and Wildlife officials said their proposal does not set up a preserve or refuge and only applies to situations where federal funding, authorization or land is involved.

In such instances, the service said in a statement, federal agencies must consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on any actions that could affect the critical habitat.

Since the acreage is mostly private land — with 610 acres owned either by the state of California or by local governments — provisions involving the federal government seemed irrelevant in the case of the Zayante band-winged grasshopper.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is asking interested parties to submit statements and information to its field supervisor at 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, Calif. 93003. Statements will be accepted until Sept. 5, and requests for a public hearing on the designation of the critical habitat must be received by Aug. 21.

Contact Lee Quarnstrom at
lquarnstrom@sjmercury.com, (831)
423-3234 or by fax, (831) 423-3119.

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