



Special to the Sentinel/Randall Morgan

## SV robust spineflower

# 4 county wildflowers get federal protection

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SCOTTS VALLEY — Four tiny wildflowers that have played a big role in the fate of several local developments are now under the protection of the federal government.

The robust spineflower and the Ben Lomond spineflower, as well as the Ben Lomond wallflower, have been placed on the federal endangered species list, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said this week. The Monterey spineflower is now considered a threatened species.

Environmentalists were overjoyed at the news, while city officials are hoping it won't sink what they expect will be a major economic boon.

"What it does is give the conservationists another tool in trying to find ways to let these species survive," said Stephen McCabe, one of two local men who first proposed endangered status for the plants. "It doesn't guarantee anything one way or the other, but it gives us another tool to have areas set aside large enough for the plants to survive."

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# Wildflowers

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Spineflowers are small, wiry annual plants that belong to the buckwheat family. The plant features a rosette of basal leaves topped in early spring by clusters of tiny whitish to pinkish-red flowers.

The wallflower is a yellow-flowered member of the mustard family.

It was a variety of the robust spineflower known as the Scotts Valley spineflower that figured prominently in the fate of a proposed golf course and 276-unit housing development planned for 270 acres off Glenwood Drive.

The project was approved by the city of Scotts Valley, but has been on hold since the county turned down plans to put two of the 18 holes on a small section outside city limits.

However, city officials say the new status of *Chorizanthe robusta* var. *hartwegii* should not affect the development.

"I think we're OK," said Scotts Valley Mayor Peggie Lopez. "... We've been acting as though it was (going to be listed)."

The spineflower also grows at the Polo Ranch, adjacent to the former Santa's Village amusement park now occupied by Borland International. Plans to build 163 houses there came to end when Borland bought the property for unspecified future expansion.

Environmental lawyer Celia

Scott said the plants' new status may mean further environmental work on the Glenwood project.

"What it really does is raise a whole lot of questions about the viability of the project at a higher level," said Scott, one of those who went to court to protect the flowers after Scotts Valley officials ruled that the benefits of the project outweighed the environmental consequences.

Lopez warned what may happen if the diminutive flower sinks the Glenwood development.

"The alternative would be real dismal," Lopez said. Developing the site as a whole will provide far more protection to the plants than parcel-by-parcel development, she said. "If this doesn't go through, someday there will be hundreds of houses there."

Plantsman Randall Morgan said he's distressed by such characterizations. The issue is not plants vs. people, he said, and humans are not the victims of plants.

"The truth is just the opposite. It's people threatening the plants," said Morgan, the other man to petition for the federal protection for the wildflowers. Plants have never threatened people, Morgan said, except, perhaps, for poison oak.

Developers of the Glenwood project, the BRUSA Corp., did not return phone calls Wednes-

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day.

Scott said the federal listing also could affect mining at the Quail Hollow Quarry, which is home to the Ben Lomond spineflower and the Ben Lomond wallflower.

Published in the Feb. 4 Federal Register, the listings take effect March 7. Once a species is so listed, federal law makes it illegal to "remove, cut, dig up, or damage or destroy" it, said the wildlife service.

The threat to the Ben Lomond spineflower, the Ben Lomond wallflower and the Scotts Valley populations of the robust spineflower comes mostly from residential development and mining, the service said.

The Monterey spineflower and the robust spineflower face threats from agricultural development and military activities, it said, as well as from plants planted to stabilize coastal sand dunes.