

✓ Spineflower nominated for endangered list

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SANTA CRUZ — Just one month after the state Fish and Game department refused to consider the Hartweg's Spineflower for placement on the state endangered species list, the federal Fish and Wildlife Service has taken the opposite stance.

The Fish and Wildlife Service announced Friday that the spineflower is now a "candidate species," and information about the flower will be reviewed over the coming year to determine whether the plant belongs on the federal endangered species list.

Local botanists say the Hartweg's Spineflower grows only in three locations, all of them in Scotts Valley and all of them sites for future development. The Santa Cruz chapter of the California Native Plant Society petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service to consider listing

Flowers
the flower.

But another prominent botanist, John Hunter Thomas of Stanford, says he has found the spineflower growing in Monterey and the plant is not nearly as rare as the CNPS claims.

FWS botanist Connie Rutherford says the federal agency will carefully study all information about the spineflower before making a decision. The FWS has no plans to undertake any studies itself, but will accept information from "concerned parties," she said.

"This finding is just the first cut," Rutherford said. "All it says is that the petition has enough information for us to consider the plant for listing."

The federal decision stands in contrast to one recently made by the state Fish and Game Commission, in which the commission decided a petition submitted by its own staff did not contain enough information to justify further

consideration.

Rutherford said both petitions contained essentially the same information, but could not explain why the outcome was so different.

The FWS has until April to decide whether the Hartweg's Spineflower belongs on the endangered species list, but the decision will probably have little impact on developments planned for Scotts Valley. Colonies of the plant have been found on a 40-acre portion of the proposed Glenwood Estates golf course, a three-acre portion of the proposed Polo Ranch subdivision and a one-acre site near Vine Hill Elementary School.

For one thing, federal legislation offers no protection for endangered animals found on privately-owned land, Rutherford said. But the listing of a species can be used to prick the consciences of local planning officials.

In addition, Scotts Valley officials have already required extensive protection for the spineflower, according to senior planner Katherine Caldwell. Dividend Development Company, developer of the Polo Ranch project, has already agreed to set aside the flower fields as permanent open space, maintain the fields, collect spineflower seeds and pay for them to be propagated at a special nursery. The Glenwood Estates developer has agreed to set aside several dozen acres for permanent wildflower habitat, and will also pay for seed collection and propagation, Caldwell said.

"All through the planning process (for the Polo Ranch and Glenwood Estates) we have treated this as a potentially rare and endangered plant," Caldwell said. "That's why we required an environmental impact report and then a supplemental EIR. We don't believe this (federal decision) will change anything," she said.