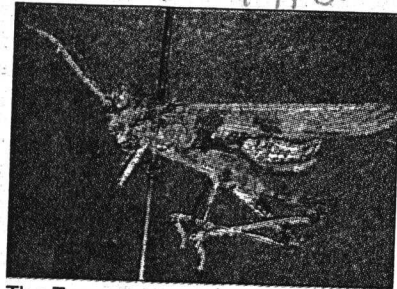


Zayante grasshopper comes under federal agency's wing

Endangered Species
Insect's habitat in Santa Cruz County may win protection

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The Zayante band-winged grasshopper's 10,000-acre habitat in Santa Cruz County may be protected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Zayante band-winged grasshopper and its advocates are jumping for joy after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed thousands of acres in Santa Cruz County be protected to help the little blue-legged insect make a comeback.

The plan, announced Monday, is the result of a settlement reached in November between the federal agency and several groups that sued to halt further destruction of the obscure bug's narrow habitat. Scientists say Zayante band-winged grasshoppers are only found in the sandy areas of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

"We believe it is important that all the small creatures that make up the

bio-diversity of the planet are protected, not just the charismatic mammals," said Brendan Cummings, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the agencies that filed the suit in March 1999.

The proposal calls for 10,560 acres bordered by Highway 9 and Highway 17 near Mount Hermon, Felton, Ben Lomond, Zayante and Scotts Valley. Please see **GRASSHOPPER** on Page A12

Grasshopper

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designated as critical habitat for the tiny grasshopper. The land is mostly privately owned. The small, pale-gray grasshopper was placed on the Endangered Species List in January 1997 after development, mining and recreation encroached on its sand hills habitat.

At that time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded survival of the grasshopper did not require steps be taken to protect its native habitat. The groups — the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, the Center for Biological Diversity and Christians Caring for Creation — claimed in their lawsuit that the Endangered Species Act required the service designate the grasshoppers only known habitat as a critical habitat. A U.S. District judge dismissed the suit when the settlement was reached.

Such a designation, provided in the Endangered Species Act, essentially requires federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before beginning any projects they fund or authorize. It does not establish a preserve or refuge.

"We have determined that designation of critical habitat for the Zayante band-winged grasshopper will help inform both the public and other fed-

eral agencies about its habitat needs," said Lois Grunwald, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman. "The grasshopper is threatened by the destruction and degradation of its habitat due to sand mining, urban development and recreational activities."

Only 610 acres of the proposed boundaries are owned by the state or local governments. Owners of private property that falls within the proposed boundaries are not required to restrict use of their land unless the use requires a federal permit, license or receives federal funds, Grunwald said. However, the Endangered Species Act prohibits taking the grasshopper without a permit.

Two quarries, Hanson Aggregates on Mount Hermon Road in Scotts Valley and Quail Hollow Quarry in Ben Lomond, are home to the grasshopper, said Cummings. It is unclear if the federal permits already approved for those operations would be subject to review, Cummings said.

"That is our one reservation," said Cummings. "It should not exclude areas that are already permitted."

Grunwald said it is "highly unlikely" that a review would alter previously approved activity.

The 60-day public comment ends Sept. 5. Public comment, data, and other information may be sent to Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ven-

tura, CA 93003. Comments may also be sent via e-mail to fw1grasshopper@r1.fws.gov. E-mails require special formatting and information is available by calling (805)644-1766. Grunwald said a public hearing may also be held and that the service will review the information and finalize its proposal by the Feb. 1, 2001 deadline.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service critical habitat proposal for the Zayante band-winged grasshopper is available on the Web at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html