

Native plant reclassified as threatened species

By BOBI WOOD
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — In a move that only minimally complicates Watsonville Municipal Airport's expansion plan, the tarplant was declared threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act on Tuesday. The plant has long been listed as an endangered species under California state law. For around the past three years, the airport has been working on the creation of a mitigation plan in coordination with the California Department of Fish and Game.

Of the 20 remaining populations of the plant, the 12 native populations are in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. The other eight are the result of experimental seed-

ing projects at Wildcat Canyon Regional Park and on East Bay Municipal Utilities District land in Contra Costa County. At one time, the plant was found from Marin County through Monterey County and throughout areas of Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

"We're the world's capital of the Santa Cruz tarplant," remarked Airport Manager Don French on Thursday. "We have more tarplants here than all the other sites combined plus an additional hundred thousand." French knows the precise number of plants, he said, because "We have to pay to count them every year." Since 1993, the airport has budgeted \$30,000 a year to care for the plants.

French said that the new clas-

sification will only impact the airport when the Federal Aviation Administration agrees to provide grant money for a desired runway expansion. "We knew, back when we started the mitigation plan, that the plant (eventually) would be listed by the feds, so the plan has been essentially shaped to those guidelines," French said.

The airport expansion plan being worked out provides for the airport to relocate the plants to areas where it doesn't interfere with workings of the airport. Fifty acres have been earmarked for the plant's new home, said French, who added, "We'll take care of them into perpetuity."

The yellow-blossomed herb

See TARPLANT, page 8



Courtesy of Don French, Watsonville Airport Manager

Blooming specimen of a tarplant, native to Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, now listed as 'threatened species.'

TARPLANT

From page 1

flowers in summer and is actually rather attractive, said French, who pointed to its ability to liven up an otherwise brown, dried-out summer landscape.

"We estimate (the new classification) will add about 90 days to whatever process we enter into," said French. "Prior to obtaining any additional federal funds or grants, we have to jump through a series of hoops and hurdles to show the FAA that our plan is in compliance with federal guidelines."