

# LANGUISHING SPECIES: WEST

## AUTUMN BUTTERCUP

**R**isk of extinction is very high for the autumn buttercup, a wet meadow species listed in 1989 and known from only one or two small populations located in the Sevier River Valley, near Panquitch, Utah. It grows to about 2 feet tall and produces abundant yellow flowers from late July to early October.

A 1975 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report to Congress indicated that the autumn buttercup was possibly extinct. Rediscovered in 1982, the species declined from about 500 plants to 22, which helped compel its listing. In 1989, The Nature Conservancy purchased 44 acres encompassing the last known location of the autumn buttercup.

**Although biologists found a new population of 200 flowering individuals on the preserve, this population also declined. As of 2005, only 18 individuals were known to exist in the wild.**

At the time of listing, autumn buttercup decline was blamed on intense agricultural activities, primarily livestock grazing of wet meadows and wetland drainage. Today, grazing has been stopped on Nature Conservancy lands. However, livestock grazing continues on surrounding private lands, and the status of the buttercup on those lands is unknown.

Recovery plan objectives include increasing the current population to 1,000 plants and establishing at least five additional sites on land managed to protect the species. In 2005, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) received \$18,661 from the Private Stewardship Grants program coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the Flagstaff, Arizona, Arboretum; the Center for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW) at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden; and Utah Valley State College. TNC used these funds to begin reintroduction projects for the autumn buttercup, which was being propagated by CREW in a project funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Servic-

es. In October 2006, CREW sent the first rooted shoots to Flagstaff. Current funding is designed to support the reintroduction and monitoring of 300 rooted shoots on the TNC site in Utah. No future funding is allocated for this species. Consequently, results of experimental introductions are unknown.

Neither the clay phacelia nor the autumn buttercup would have any recovery dollars if small, specialized, in-house grant opportunities did not exist. Both recovery efforts are working on a budget of \$25,000 or less for ongoing actions of multiple years. The funding gap to more aggressive protection for listed plants could be filled with relatively few dollars. About \$100,000 annually directed at plants for 10 years could provide the science for the downlisting or recovery of at least 30 percent of Utah's 24 listed plants.

In fiscal year 2004, funding for the autumn buttercup ranked 921st of 1,311 listed species, with \$3,600 provided from all federal sources.



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