

LANGUISHING SPECIES: WEST

CLAY PHACELIA

Listed in 1978, when only about nine individual plants were known to exist, the clay phacelia was one of the first plants listed under the Endangered Species Act. This Utah native grows to only about 12 inches tall and produces blue to violet flowers from June to August.

By 1980, due to railroad construction and trampling by sheep, only four plants were known to survive. Presently, the species lives in only two locations within Spanish Fork Canyon, Utah, where it grows on fine-textured soil and fragmented shale. Biologists have tallied fewer than 100 plants at each site.

Threats include drought, fire, grazing and construction and maintenance activities. Recovery plan objectives include increasing plant numbers and establishing at least one new population. Without achievement of these objectives, survival of this species is doubtful.

Of the two known populations, only part of one population is on protected land, owned by The Nature Conservancy. The other population is on unprotected private land that was subjected to road construction in 2002. Prior to 2004, biologists stored about 1,400 seeds for future reintroduction if funding became available. Some of these seeds had been stored for 24 years. After the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service earmarked \$25,000 to establish and augment populations near the end of 2004, tests proved that the older seeds were inadequate for propagation. However, seeds collected in 2005 resulted in approximately 60 mother plants that produced 11,000 seeds. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists estimate that 2,400 plants will be “field ready” in 2007. Reintroductions are slated for 13 sites in Uinta National Forest.

The \$25,000 grant, which came from the U.S. Fish



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and Wildlife Service Preventing Extinction Fund, allowed federal biologists, within three years, to reach the point of experimental introductions. Prior to that grant, funding for the species from all federal sources, according to Fish and Wildlife Service figures, was typically in the range of the \$4,900 made available in fiscal year 2004, the most recent year for which figures are available. At that level, funding for the clay phacelia ranked 884th out of 1,311 listed species. Because of such traditionally low funding, the current recovery efforts did not begin until 28 years after listing and 22 years after completion of the 1982 recovery plan. “No future funding is allocated or known for this species,” says endangered species biologist Pat Mehlhop, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Denver office. “All activities are based on finding funds.”