

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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MAJOR REVIEW OF U.S. PLANTS FOR ENDANGERED STATUS

More than 10 percent of all plant varieties in the United States are being reviewed for possible classification as endangered or threatened species. The areas where the plants exist are also being studied to determine if they qualify as "critical habitats."

The review, announced today by Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was undertaken in response to a report prepared by the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian was directed to review the status of plants by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The report found that of the more than 22,000 kinds of seed plants and ferns native to this country, about 2,800 are likely candidates for either the threatened or endangered lists. The report also found that 355 kinds of native plants are thought to be extinct.

A majority of the plants to be reviewed are found in Hawaii, California, Florida, and Texas. In Hawaii over 1,100 species, almost 50 percent of the State's native plants, are on the list. Other major concentrations of the plants are found in the Pacific Northwest and the Southern Appalachian regions. At least one plant on the list is found in each State.

Many types of wildflowers are on the list such as lilies, irises, orchids, primroses, and columbines along with the more bizarre species such as the venus fly trap and some pitcher plants. Cacti are particularly

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hard hit with an estimated one-third of all their species believed to be either threatened or endangered. Among the trees to be reviewed are the Florida royal palm, a 120-foot giant with nine-foot leaves, and several types of oak, ash, cypress, willow, and hawthorne. A considerable number of shrubs and grasses are also on the list. None are major food sources for humans.

The precise reasons for their decline are not yet known; however, it is generally agreed that the destruction of habitat and commercialization have been major causes. Plant habitats are continuously being eliminated by strip mining, overgrazing, timber harvesting, suburban development, road construction, flooding, irrigation, stream channelization, fire, and the drainage of bogs, swamps, and marshes. Commercial and private collectors have been largely responsible for threatening the survival of certain groups of plants, especially cacti. Some of the most rare and beautiful cacti are collected by the truckload and may bring several hundred dollars each. Competition from foreign species has also affected native plants. Over 2,000 species of foreign plants have been introduced into the United States. Some, such as the common dandelion from Europe and the honeysuckle from Asia, can become firmly established in new areas and choke off older and more delicate plant types. Disease and pollution have also depleted these plant populations.

Today most of the plants to be reviewed have extremely limited ranges and are often confined to bogs, marshes, river banks, mountain tops, canyon rims, and similar inaccessible areas.

"This is the first attempt ever made to assess the status of plant life on a national scale," said Schreiner. "Many of the plants have never been intensively studied before and little is known of them in terms of population trends, growth, and reproductive rates.

"Naturally, in large scale reviews such as the one we are now undertaking, the actual listing of the species and the determination of their critical habitats could take several years. However, as in our listing of animal species, priority is being given to those species which could best be helped by listing."

The Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking the views of the Governors of the States in which these plants are thought to occur. Other interested persons are encouraged to submit any factual information relevant to this review to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (SE), Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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