

# Prairie Conservation and the USFWS

South Puget Sound Prairie Landscape Working Group

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**What does the ESA do?** As an environmental law, it was designed to protect critically imperiled species from extinction as a "consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation."

**What is a listed species?** Listing is the process of adding a species to the Federal list of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

**What is a candidate species?** Candidate species are those species for which the Service has sufficient information on biological vulnerability and threat(s) to support listing but listing is precluded by other, higher priority listing actions.

- 4 Prairie Species have been candidates since 2002: Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, Mazama pocket gopher (9 subspecies), mardon skipper, and the streaked horned lark.

## **What is the Service doing in relationship to Prairie Conservation?**

- Proactive conservation thru:
  - Funding for research, enhancement, and restoration
  - Habitat Analysis ie. Habitat Suitability Model/Prairie Reserve Design Model
  - Partner coordination: JBLM, WDFW, WDNR, NRCS, Thurston County, Thurston County Economic Development Council, Thurston County Conservation District
- Conducting a Status Review

**What is a status review?** An evaluation to determine whether to list a species as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. That is, determining whether these species are in need of protections provided under the ESA.

## **What we look at:**

- Biology, natural history, and habitat requirements
- Current and historical population
- Status and threats
- State/provincial/tribal/Federal laws and regulations
- Existing habitat protection
- Conservation activities undertaken or in process

**What are some of the known threats facing these species?** Habitat conversion for human uses, invasive plants, and fire exclusion have all contributed to reduce populations and habitat of prairie species.

**Why are we doing the status review?** Internal priorities changed as a result of litigation.

**When is the status review due?** At the end of September 2012.

**What are the potential conclusions of this status review (for one or more species)?**

- *A not warranted finding* for listing which removes species from the candidate list
- *A proposed rule* which proposes to list species and to designate critical habitat. This document is published in the Federal Register and the public given at least 60 days to review the proposal and provide comments or additional information. After the comment period ends, we consider and analyze all the public comments and make a final decision on whether to list the species as threatened or endangered.

**Where are these species found? What areas could be affected?** Depends upon species but may include the Puget Trough Prairies, Willamette Valley, and the Washington Coast.

### **Thurston County Prairie HCP**

-Since January 2012, the Service has been working with Thurston County on HCP development

-County has focused on CAO updates until recently; CAO may provide basis for HCP implementation

-County has contracted with WDFW for updating/synthesizing best available science for prairie species

-Prairie reserve network may be an integral component of HCP conservation strategy

### **Take Home Points**

- We have lost 90% of native prairie ecosystem. Of that- less than 3% is considered high quality prairie. High quality prairies have the requisite soil and vegetation to support prairie species.
- Prairies add to the biodiversity by supporting a range of unique plants, insects, birds and mammals.
- The Service is working closely with local governments, tribes, state and federal agencies and other partners to conserve prairie ecosystems and the species they support while seeking ways to be compatible with human uses in these areas.
- The prairie reserve network under development with USGS, WDFW and other partners may provide a basis for identifying what prairie habitat is important for long term persistence of prairie species.
- The Service is committed in the long term to prairie conservation.