



Habitat land needs of endangered plants to get second look

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The Obama administration has agreed to re-evaluate the amount of land that should be protected for two endangered plants found only in western Riverside County, an environmental group reported Tuesday.

The Center for Biological Diversity had sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last fall, contending that not enough land was designated as "critical habitat" for the Munz's onion, which grows in clay-rich soils between Murrieta and Corona, and the San Jacinto Valley crownscale, found near the San Jacinto River in the Hemet area.

A critical-habitat designation makes land more difficult to develop because federal officials must ensure that enough habitat is left for the species to recover.

An agreement reached in settling the lawsuit requires Fish and Wildlife to propose new critical habitat areas for the two plants by October 2011 and make the designation final by 2013, said Ileene Anderson, a biologist for the center.

Currently, 176 acres in the Cleveland National Forest is considered critical habitat for the Munz's onion, a perennial herb with white and pink flowers.

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