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Feds deny protection for San Juan Island butterfly

SEATTLE_The Island Marble butterfly, a recently rediscovered species thought to have been extinct for more than 90 years, will not be added to the federal list of threatened and endangered species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced.

Environmental groups that had sought protection for the butterfly condemned Tuesday's move.

The decision followed a 12-month status review, the agency said. It concluded the species does not warrant listing because threats to its survival are not as great as previously thought. Also, the National Park Service, the primary landowner of Island Marble habitat, is moving to protect the insect.

"The Park Service efforts, and actions taken by private landowners, have reduced the threats to the species," said Ren Lohofener, director of the service's Pacific region.

Lohofener said he wants to encourage voluntary efforts to help the butterfly, including the West Coast Butterfly Initiative, which will focus attention on more than a dozen declining species of West Coast butterflies and provide support for conservation actions.

Protection for the butterfly under the Endangered Species Act was sought in 2002 by the Xerces Society, [the Center for Biological Diversity](#), Friends of the San Juans and the Northwest Ecosystem Alliance.

"We are highly disappointed by this decision," said Scott Hoffman Black, executive director of the Xerces Society. "There are less than a thousand island marble butterflies left and there are multiple threats that could lead to their extinction. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the failure of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to take protective actions for this rare butterfly."

In an earlier finding, the service said no emergency listing was required because the butterfly occupied a larger area than was previously thought.

The park service said it conducted 325 surveys in six northern Washington counties, including 16 in the San Juan Islands. Those efforts turned up 26 distinct Island Marble butterfly locations and found at least four new populations on San Juan and Lopez Islands.

The Island Marble butterfly is a non-migratory species that lives its entire life on San Juan and Lopez islands.

The groups seeking protection said the Island Marble is one of several species that depend on the once extensive prairies found in the Puget Trough. These prairies have declined to less than 3% of their historic extent, the groups said in a news release.

"The biggest current threat to the Island Marble is mismanagement of its habitat at San Juan Island National Historical Park American Camp, where the only known viable populations reside," the release said. "Shunning the advice of Island Marble experts, American Camp staff sprayed herbicide on over 5 acres within the Park as part of a prairie-restoration project in 2005. This herbicide use devastated core habitat for the Island Marble and likely killed dozens of larvae feeding on plants at the site. The park has now refused to work with conservationists to ensure that habitat is managed properly."