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The desert plant not too endangered; Army can expand training ground **FORT IRWIN: The Army can expand a training area over land where a desert herb is growing.**

By Jennifer Bowles
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To the dismay of environmental groups, federal wildlife officials on Tuesday denied protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act to a west Mojave Desert herb, saying the plant is plentiful and its threats are minimal.

Environmentalists had sought protection for the desert cymopterus, a perennial member of the carrot family that has tiny purple flowers, in part because it grows on land being expanded by the Army for tank-training at Fort Irwin north of Barstow.

"Denying protection for the desert cymopterus ignores the science and on-the-ground reality of threats and lack of protection for this attractive wildflower," said Daniel R. Patterson, desert ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, which has an office in Idyllwild.

Environmentalists say that the desert cymopterus, also called the desert spring parsley, is on the brink of extinction in the west Mojave Desert.

In announcing its decision, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service noted that the Fort Irwin expansion could potentially threaten three populations of the plant. However, wildlife officials said, the Army built a permanent fence around 298 acres where

the largest population of 366 plants live. In addition, at nearby Edwards Air Force Base, the military has undertaken conservation measures to protect 87 percent of the known population. Grazing of livestock, the service said, is all but eliminated where the plants live.

In all, surveyors counted 105 groups of the plant in the last year, said Lois Grunwald of the wildlife service.

Environmental groups worried that not all would be protected adequately.

"To allow a species to have a good chance of surviving into the future, you want to have some sort of protection across the range of the species, especially for plants," said Ileene Anderson, a botanist with the California Native Plant Society.