

<https://apnews.com/article/billings-mountains-wildlife-montana-2c96777353be95d9e28195397b27df87>

Groups say mining would risk rare plant in Pryor Mountains

today

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[In this undated photo provided by Peter Lesica, is a thick-leaf bladderpod, a small, flowering plant found in the arid foothills of the Pryor Mountains along the Montana-Wyoming border. Conservation groups are seeking federal protections for the plants after a mining project was proposed for the areas. \(Peter Lesica via AP\)](#)

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Conservation groups filed a petition with government wildlife officials Thursday seeking protections for a plant that's found only in the arid foothills of the Pryor Mountains along the Montana-Wyoming border, where a mining project is being proposed.

The thick-leaf bladderpod is a small, flowering plant that depends for survival on a fragile type of soil that's made of lichens, mosses and other organisms.

Researchers say the plant is largely limited to an area of only about 23 square miles (60 square kilometers) in southcentral Montana. The region receives as little as 8 inches of rain annually on average.

The Montana Native Plant Society, Pryors Coalition and Center for Biological Diversity filed a petition with federal officials seeking protections for the plant under the Endangered Species Act.

They say it's threatened by a gypsum mining project proposed for the area that could damage the thick-leaf bladderpod's habitat by disturbing the fragile soil.

The mining company Grupo Cementos de Chihuahua is seeking permission from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to drill holes up to 200 feet deep in the Pryors to explore for gypsum, which is used in cement and other products.

The company, based in Mexico with offices in Glendale, Colorado, said in its operations plan that it will try to reduce disturbance to the area by using existing roads and trails when possible.