

## Sand dune phacelia gets threatened species classification

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In response to a petition and lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protected the sand dune phacelia as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

The agency also designated 180 acres as protected critical habitat for this coastal dune plant in 13 units in Coos and Curry counties in southern Oregon, and Del Norte County, California.

“These beautiful and rugged plants are emblematic of our native coastal sand dune habitats and I’m thrilled they’ll get the protection they deserve,” said Jeff Miller, a senior conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Endangered Species Act protections will help sand dune phacelia and our dwindling intact dune habitats recover and thrive. It shouldn’t have taken nine years for Fish and Wildlife to take action, but hopefully it’s not too late.”

Sand dune phacelia has declined to 25 naturally occurring populations, many of them with few remaining plants, including in iconic places like Oregon’s Cape Blanco.

The plants are threatened by invasive species such as European beach grass and gorse, damage from off-road vehicles, and climate change-driven sea level rise. Its small population size makes the species even more susceptible to these threats.

Sand dune phacelia is in the Forget-Me-Not family of flowering plants and grows to be 18 inches tall, with white flowers that are a rich source of nectar and pollen for native bees. The number of bees and variety of bee species found in dune vegetation is higher in places where phacelia grows.

The plant requires sandy habitats that are relatively free of competing vegetation and is adapted to living on nutrient-poor sand dune areas with high winds, blowing sand and salt spray. Its silvery hairs, an adaptation to the harsh coastal environment, keep salt off its leaves, decrease water loss and reflect excess light. The name “phacelia” is from the Greek “phakelos,” meaning cluster, for its lovely, clustered flowers; and the Latin “argentea,” meaning silvery, for the appearance of its leaves. The phacelia blooms from March to September.

This listing comes in response to a Center lawsuit seeking timely status evaluations and protection decisions for 241 plant and animal species thought to be trending toward extinction, including the sand dune phacelia.

The Center and seven other conservation groups (Oregon Wild, Friends of Del Norte, Oregon Coast Alliance, the Native Plant Society of Oregon, the California Native Plant Society, the Environmental Protection Information Center and the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center) petitioned to protect the phacelia in 2014.