

## Conserving Hidden Gems: Rare plants and high-elevation crustaceans get a helping hand

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Fantastic news for rare plants and aquatic species found within the Lassics Botanical Area! With the help of partners and under the guidance of the forest-wide Aquatic Restoration Environmental Assessment, the Six Rivers National Forest is taking action to protect two special vernal pools.

How? By installing split-rail fencing made from repurposed cedar logs. This initiative aims to conserve rare plant species like the Lassics Lupine (*Lupinus constancei*) and create a better habitat for aquatic species like fairy shrimp.

Partners on this project include the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and Native Health in Native Hands (NHNH). NHNH is a native-led non-profit organization founded by the Kinest'e people (Wailaki), who are deeply connected to this land.

They work tirelessly to promote intergenerational wellness and reconnect their youth and community to their responsibilities towards Mother Earth and each other. The YCC and NHNH have secured funding through the Trinity County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) for this and other projects spanning 2023 to 2024. We're thrilled to collaborate with our partners, who strive to foster a connection with nature and pass on traditional ecological knowledge to future generations.

Vernal pools are unique wetland habitats found in shallow depressions that hold water for only part of the year. These pools play a crucial role in supporting flora and fauna that rely on this temporary habitat to

survive in challenging conditions. They provide water purification, serve as a habitat for various life cycle stages, and help with flood control. Sadly, in California, only 10% of vernal pools remain, with less than one percent within Six Rivers National Forest.

The Red Lassic vernal pools, with their high-elevation serpentine soils, are particularly special and support sensitive species like fairy shrimp. These fairy shrimp, exclusive to vernal pools, serve as a vital food source for amphibians and migratory birds, while also filtering nutrients for other pool-dwelling species.

The presence of these valuable habitats attracts grazing animals to other sensitive areas within the Botanical/Geological area, including the Red Lassic population of Lassics Lupine (*Lupinus constancei*). This lupine species is extremely rare. It is known only from the Lassics Botanical Area and is currently in the process of being listed as a Federally Endangered Species due to factors such as low numbers, habitat loss, predation, and competition.

Additionally, the rare Forest Service Sensitive species, the Lassics sandwort which is also known to occur only in the Lassics Botanical Area, was found near the lower pool. By completing this project, we hope to alleviate some of the grazing pressure on the lupine and other sensitive plant populations.

We're excited about the progress we're making in conserving these hidden gems and protecting the delicate balance of nature. Together with our partners, we're taking steps to ensure a brighter future for these rare plants and high-elevation crustaceans. Stay tuned for more updates on our ongoing efforts!