

Nevada reviews possible mining threat to unique wildflower

November 9 2019, by Scott Sonner

Nevada is launching a comprehensive review of the status of a desert wildflower that isn't known to exist anywhere else in the world because of concerns about potential effects from new mining exploration.

The move comes after the Center for Biological Diversity sued the Trump administration last month to try to block mining operations they say would wipe out the Tiehm's buckwheat. The conservationists also have filed an emergency petition with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the flower as an [endangered species](#).

The state Division of Natural Heritage has been monitoring the status of the plant since it was discovered in 1985 in the Silver Peak Range, about 120 miles (193 kilometers) southeast of Reno, said Bradley Crowell, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The delicate wildflower typically grows about 2 feet (half a meter) tall with white, cream or yellow blooms.

It hadn't faced significant threats in the past due to its remote location, but that's changed with new interest in mining exploration for lithium deposits in the area, Crowell said. Lithium is a key component in the manufacturing of batteries for [electric cars](#) such as the ones made at Tesla's battery factory east of Reno.

"Nevada is home to more than 150 [plant species](#) that live exclusively in

our state, including the one-of-a-kind Tiehm buckwheat," Crowell said Thursday in announcing the new status review that will begin this month.

"As part of our mission, the (department) is committed to protecting Nevada's precious [native species](#) and sustaining our diverse biological heritage," he said.

Crowell said a schedule of public meetings to review the status of the species will be announced soon.

"Input from the public and the use of the best available science is critical to this process," he said.

The lawsuit filed against the Trump administration last month in U.S. District Court in Las Vegas said the plants are vulnerable to [climate change](#), wildfires, invasive species, livestock grazing and off-road vehicle use but the most significant, immediate threat is mining.

"It's encouraging that the state agrees that this little wildflower faces dire threats and needs to be evaluated for protection," Patrick Donnelly, the center's Nevada state director, said Friday. "We appreciate the state of Nevada taking this important first step toward the permanent protection Tiehm's buckwheat desperately needs."

The lawsuit accuses the U.S. Bureau of Land Management of illegally dividing the mining operations proposed near the flower's habitat into two separate projects so as to bypass its own regulations requiring a formal environmental review and public comment on any land disturbances larger than 5 acres (2 hectares).

The estimated 20,000 to 43,000 individual plants that remain are found only in specific soil conditions on 21 acres spread across 3 square miles (8 square kilometers) of Nevada in a narrow elevation band between

5,960 and 6,200 feet (1,816 and 1,889 meters), according to the petition filed Oct. 7 seeking protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Bureau spokesman Rudy Evenson said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation. But he said it "takes the protection of this [species](#) seriously and is committed to the deliberate process to ensure it is protected."

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