5-YEAR REVIEW
Malheur wire-lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*)

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Species: *Stephanomeria malheurensis*
Date listed: November 10, 1982
FR citation(s): 47 FR 50881-50886. Determination of *Stephanomeria malheurensis* (Malheur wire-lettuce) To Be an Endangered Species, With Determination of Its Critical Habitat.
Classification: Endangered

BACKGROUND: Malheur wire-lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) is an annual plant in the family Asteraceae. It is known solely from its type location, a broad hilltop on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands near Narrows, Oregon (south of Burns in Harney County), and has never been found outside of this one site despite efforts to locate potential additional populations. Critical habitat is designated on a 160-acre (65-hectare) area at this site, within what is now the South Narrows Area of Critical Environmental Concern. When the Malheur wire-lettuce was listed as endangered in 1982, there were an estimated 50 individuals present. By the next year the population had dropped to nine plants, and by 1985 the species was considered extinct in the wild (ODA 2012, p. 1). Seeds had been collected and were available from storage, so between 1986 and 1990 more than 1,300 seedlings were out-planted at the Narrows site (ODA 2012, p. 2). The reintroduced population was left to persist on its own after 1990 and declined over the years until in 2004 the species was once again considered extinct in the wild (ODA 2012, p. 2). Subsequent efforts to recover the species are described in our most recent Malheur wire-lettuce 5-year review (USFWS 2019, entire).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) published a recovery plan for the Malheur wire-lettuce in 1991 (USFWS 1991, entire)(available at https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/910321.pdf). In 2018, we completed a supplemental finding for the recovery plan (USFWS 2018, entire). In this finding, we acknowledged that the development of delisting criteria is impracticable for Malheur wire-lettuce because the repeated failed attempts to restore the species to its only known habitat clearly indicate that we do not adequately understand the life history requirements of the species, nor do we have sufficient information to identify and address the limiting factors acting on the species such that it appears to be incapable of sustaining itself in the wild.

Most recent status review: The most recent status review was completed July 31, 2019. Citation: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2019. Malheur wire-lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) 5-Year Review: Summary and Evaluation

FR Notice citation announcing this status review: 88 FR 17611-17614, March 23, 2023. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Initiation of 5-Year Status Reviews for 133 Species in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, California, Nevada, Hawaii, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

ASSESSMENT:

Information acquired since the last status review: This 5-year review was conducted by the Service's Bend Field Office of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office. We solicited data for this review from interested parties through a Federal Register notice published March 23, 2023. We also contacted members of the Malheur wire-lettuce working group on March 28, 2024, to request any data or new information we should consider in our review. The Malheur wire-lettuce working group is an informal group comprised of members from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), the Service, the Burns District BLM, Rae Selling Berry Seed Bank, Oregon State University Cascades, Ashland University and United States Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS).

The working group met for the first time in several years on January 17th, 2024, to discuss future recovery projects and research opportunities to facilitate Malheur wire-lettuce recovery. After considering possible projects and ideas, the working group determined that the driving forces inhibiting recruitment at the critical habitat site are still not evident. Based upon the input received from the working group, the Service concluded another out-planting at the site at this time would not produce productive results due to degraded habitat, and that further research is needed. We agreed that remaining seed needs to be propagated in an effort to increase the seed resources (seed bulking) to sustain Malheur wire-lettuce into the future. Collaboration with partners on seed viability testing and seed bulking is ongoing.

Botanists and biologists from the Malheur wire-lettuce working group visited the Narrows site in early June of 2024, and found that Malheur wire-lettuce and other wire-lettuce species were absent not only in areas with cheatgrass infestation but also from all plots where it had been planted where no cheatgrass was present (Wilk 2024, *in litt*). This observation indicates that some factor other than, or in addition to, competition with cheatgrass is likely negatively affecting the persistence of Malheur wire-lettuce in its native habitat. What that factor may be, however, remains unknown.

Critical habitat area near Narrows, Oregon at plot study site. Photos taken at two separate plots show areas of cheat grass with an absence of Malheuer wire-lettuce. Photos by Brian Wilk.

The Dunes site was also visited on the same trip and a wire-lettuce species was present. However, the wire-lettuce was in the early basal rosette stage of growth and did not show identifiable characteristics. A repeat site-visit by the Burns district BLM to the Dunes site occurred in late June and again, it was early for most wire-lettuce to show identifiable characteristics. The plants that did show identifiable characteristics, however, were believed to be *Stephanomeria exigua ssp coronaria* based on ligule length and flowers fully opened at midday (Foster 2024, *in litt*). A third trip to the Dunes site occurred in mid-July by botanists and biologists of the Service, BLM Burns district, and USDA-ARS. Several wire-lettuce plants were flowering and occurring in areas outside of plots from the 2007 and 2008 planting study (ODA 2012, p.10). Identifiable characteristics such as ligule length and number of pappus bristles were used to determine that wire-lettuce at the Dunes site is *S. coronaria* and not *S. malheurensis*. Considering the characteristics were somewhat hard to determine and overlapped between species it is possible the plants were misidentified, however, with a scarce number of plants on the fringes of the plot and not near the planting sites from 2007 and 2008 it is likely that *S. malheurensis* is not present in the Dunes site study area.

Pappus bristles of *S. coronaria* at the Dunes site. Photos by Lisa Foster.

Additional future site visits should take place between late July and early August as our original site visits were too early for flowering wire-lettuce. Another site visit to the area of critical habitat would have been beneficial during late July and early August to determine if we missed the growth stage of *S. malheurensis* in early June.

We based this 5-year review on an evaluation of the most current scientific information that has become available since the last 5-year review for Malheur wire-lettuce that was completed in 2019.

We have not acquired/are not aware of any information that has become available since the most recent status review. We did not receive any additional information from the public in response to our Federal Register Notice announcing this 5-year review.

Conclusion:

After reviewing the best available scientific information, we conclude that Malheur wire-lettuce remains an endangered species. The evaluation of threats affecting the species under the factors in 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act and analysis of the status of the species in our last 5-year review of Malheur wire-lettuce published in 2019 remains an accurate reflection of the species current status.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS:

- Continue seed bulking to retain current seed supply.
- Halt seedling planting at designated sites until we gain an improved understanding of habitat needs for the species.
- Monitor habitat of Malheur wire-lettuce for signs of survival of the species in the wild.
- Monitor planting of "seed pods" or other novel techniques to determine seed to maturation success at the native site.

State Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office

Approve KESSINA LEE Digitally signed by KESSINA LEE Date: 2024.09.04 13:02:16 -07'00' Date _____

Literature Cited

Oregon Department of Agriculture. 2012. Malheur wirelettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) reintroduction and seed bulking: 2011 recovery efforts. Unpublished report prepared by J. Brown, R. Currin, and R. Meinke, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Native Plant Conservation Program, for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1 (Grant No. 13420-06-J632), dated March 31, 2012. 41 pages.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1991. Malheur Wire Lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) Recovery Plan. Prepared by Dr. Robert L. Parenti for Region 1, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon. 29 pages + appendices.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2018. Supplemental Finding for Malheur Wire Lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) Recovery Plan. Unpublished report, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1, dated September 20, 2018.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2019. Malheur Wire Lettuce (*Stephanomeria malheurensis*) 5-Year Review: Summary and Evaluation. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, Portland, Oregon. 39 pages.

Correspondence

Foster L. 2024, *In Litt.* Trip report from BLM Botanist to Malheur wire-lettuce working group. July 18 Dunes Revisit-Malheur wire-lettuce.

Wilk B. 2024, *In Litt.* Trip report from USFWS Biologist to Malheur wire-lettuce working group. MWL Site Visit 6.5.24.