Green Pitcher Plant
(*Sarracenia oreophila*)

5-Year Status Review:
Summary and Evaluation

Photo by M. Scott Wiggers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southeast Region
Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office
Jackson, Mississippi

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5-YEAR STATUS REVIEW
Green Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia oreophila*)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Current classification: Endangered

Lead Field Office: Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office, Scott Wiggers, (601) 205–9602

Review prepared by: Scott Wiggers, Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office

Reviewers:

Lead Regional Office: Southeast Region, Carrie Straight

Cooperating Field Office(s): Alabama Ecological Services Field Office, Erin Lentz; Georgia Ecological Services Field Office, Mincy Moffett

Date of original listing: October 21, 1979 (44 FR 54922; September 21, 1979)

Methodology used to complete the review:

In accordance with section 4(c)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), the purpose of a status review is to assess each threatened species or endangered species to determine whether its status has changed and if it should be classified differently or removed from the Lists of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants (50 CFR 424.11). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) evaluated the best available information about green pitcher plant's biology, habitat, and threats to inform this status review.

We announced initiation of this review in the Federal Register on June 6, 2024 (89 FR 48437), with a 60-day comment period and received no comments. The primary sources of information used in this analysis were the final listing rule, the 1994 revised recovery plan (Service 1994), previous 5-year reviews (Service 2014, 2020), peer-reviewed reports, agency reports, unpublished survey data and reports, and personal communication with recognized experts. This review was completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office, Jackson, Mississippi. All literature and documents used for this review are on file at the Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office. A completed draft of this 5-year review was sent to other affected Service offices in the species' range for review and comment. All comments received were evaluated and incorporated into this final document as appropriate. All recommendations resulting from this review are the result of thoroughly reviewing the best available information on green pitcher plant.

Federal Register (FR) Notice citation announcing the species is under active review: June 6, 2024 (89 FR 48437)

Species' Recovery Priority Number at start of 5-year review (48 FR 43098, 48 FR 51985): 8. Green pitcher plant is a species with a moderate degree of threat and high recovery potential.

Review history: Two previous 5-year reviews recommending no change in status were completed on April 1, 2014 (Service 2014) and September 9, 2020 (Service 2020).

REVIEW ANALYSIS

Listed Entity

Taxonomy and Nomenclature

We are not aware of any changes to the taxonomy of this entity, and it is still considered valid by the Service.

Distinct Population Segment (DPS) (61 FR 4722)

The Act defines species as including any subspecies of fish or wildlife or plants, and any distinct population segment of any species of vertebrate wildlife. This definition limits listing of a DPS to only vertebrate species. Because the species under review is a not a vertebrate, the DPS policy does not apply.

Recovery Criteria

Recovery Plan

Green Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia oreophila*) Recovery Plan, Second Revision, December 12, 1994.

Recovery plans are not regulatory documents and intended to provide guidance to the Service, States, and other partners on methods of minimizing threats to listed species and on criteria that may be used to determine when recovery is achieved. If the recovery criteria defined in the plan are still valid, meeting recovery criteria can indicate that the species no longer requires protections under the Act; however, when recommending whether a listed species should be delisted, the Service must apply the factors in section 4(a) of the Act (84 FR 45020). Green pitcher plant's recovery criteria are:

> "*Sarracenia oreophila* will be considered for delisting when a minimum of 18 viable populations, representing the diversity of habitats and the geographic range of the species, are protected and managed as necessary to ensure their continued existence. Colonies should also include the wide spectrum of current genetic variation found in the species, which will be investigated as a recovery task. Of the 18 populations, at least three colonies should be located within each of the following four geographic areas: Coosa Valley, Lookout Mountain, East Sand Mountain, West Sand Mountain, and Lake Chatuge.
>
> A population will be considered protected when it is legally protected from any present or foreseeable threats and is actively managed. A population will be considered viable if it is successfully sexually reproducing and the population size is stable or increasing. A successfully sexually reproducing population is one which has consistent seed production followed by seedling establishment. Population viability should be confirmed through long-term monitoring (20- to 30-year period) before a final assessment of its eligibility for delisting is made." (Service 1994, p. 10)

The Service believes these criteria are appropriate and relevant; however, no criteria have currently been met, although progress has been made to protect and manage eight populations.

Biology and Habitat Summary

Limited new information on populations is available; however, one small population, consisting of a single plant on private property was discovered in central Towns County, Georgia (Moffett, pers. comm. 2025), and increases the number of known extant, natural populations to 14. This represents an increase of one population since the most recent 5-year review (Service 2020), but remains below the 15 populations reported in the 2014 5-year review (Service 2014). Most (12) of green pitcher plant extant populations occur in Alabama (Cherokee, DeKalb, Etowah, and Marshall counties), while the remaining two populations occur in Georgia and North Carolina, with the latest discovery in Towns County, Georgia representing one population and the remaining population being composed of two colonies on either side of the Georgia-North Carolina state line (one in Towns County, Georgia and the other in Clay County, North Carolina). Eight populations or portions of populations are found on public or non-governmental conservation lands and, as such, these populations receive enhanced protections and conservation considerations. Seven of these populations are located in Alabama: DeSoto State Park – 2, Little River Canyon National Preserve – 3, and preserves owned by The Nature Conservancy – 2. One population occurs on two preserves owned by The Nature Conservancy (one each in Georgia and North Carolina), which are separated by less than 1-mile (i.e., the provisional population defined in Service 2014).

We are not aware of any additional new biology or habitat information since the most recent species review that impacts the status of the species and information provided in the last 5-year review remains valid (Service 2020).

Conservation Activities

Active habitat management (e.g., prescribed fire and hand clearing) is ongoing at populations throughout green pitcher plant's range to reduce competing vegetation and maintain the open conditions green pitcher plant needs. These are often cooperative efforts, such as between the Alabama Plant Conservation Alliance (APCA), Auburn University, and DeSoto State Park to manage and maintain the park's population (Thompson 2020; Thompson and Kirby 2023). Similarly, as noted in previous 5-year reviews, green pitcher plants occur on the National Park Service's Little River Canyon National Preserve, including within a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) powerline right-of-way. TVA cooperatively manages this right-of-way with the National Park Service, assisting with vegetation management through prescribed fire and hand clearing and avoiding herbicide application near green pitcher plants (TVA 2024). The Nature Conservancy also actively manages preserves supporting green pitcher plant in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina (e.g., Byrd 2022; Brown 2024, pers. comm.; Vogel and Brown 2024). Additionally, comprehensive surveys of green pitcher plant on Little River Canyon National Preserve have recently been conducted but data are not currently available (Shew 2025, pers. comm.). The species was also included in a gap analysis of *ex situ* (off-site) collections held by various botanical gardens (Bruns et al. 2022). This assessment noted that 45 institutions have reported living specimens of green pitcher plant, although it is unclear how many of these *ex situ* collections are for conservation vs. other (e.g., educational) purposes.

As described in more detail in previous 5-year reviews (Service 2014, 2020), outplantings of green pitcher plant have been made in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina in attempts to

establish new and augment existing populations. Most recently, the APCA and various cooperators outplanted green pitcher plants at two sites in Alabama, which are being maintained with periodic habitat management (Service 2020; Thompson 2020; Thompson and Kirby 2023). In addition, a small population (3 clumps) of green pitcher plant has also been established on private property in McDowell County, North Carolina (North Carolina Natural Heritage Program [NCNHP] 2024), but details are unavailable regarding the provenance (origin) of plants, establishment history, and goals of this outplanting, and, as such, this site is not currently considered to be a population contributing to recovery of this species.

Threats (Five-Factor Analysis) Summary

The status of a species is determined from an assessment of factors specified in section 4(a)(1) of the Act. A summary of this assessment is detailed below.

Factor A: the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range.

The threat of habitat loss and destruction has been reduced since listing with 8 of 14 known extant populations protected on state, federal, or non-governmental conservation lands. However, development of upslope properties adjacent to the Lake Chatuge green pitcher plant preserves (representing one protected population) may disrupt the hydrology of these sites (Hodges 2013, pers. comm.), thereby degrading habitat and impacting the protected population. In addition, green pitcher plant habitats have been degraded and destroyed by cattle trampling, logging activity, fire exclusion, and/or encroachment of competing vegetation (Service 2014). Where necessary, potential threats from trampling by cattle can be ameliorated by erecting fences around green pitcher plant bogs, which will prevent cattle from accessing these sensitive sites.

As described in more detail in the 2014 5-year review (Service 2014), fire is an important part of maintaining open habitats and limiting growth of competing vegetation for green pitcher plants. In the absence of natural fire regimes at upland sites, green pitcher plants continue to require regular habitat management (e.g., prescribed fires and/or hand/mechanical removal of competing vegetation) to maintain suitable habitat. Without such habitat management, encroaching vegetation can quickly degrade habitat and outcompete green pitcher plants for available resources.

The open habitat that streambank populations of green pitcher plants need is maintained by periodic scouring floods, which reduce competing vegetation. However, as noted in the most recent 5-year review (Service 2020), powerful floods in Alabama's Little River may have caused the loss of most known streambank sites along the river, resulting in the extirpation of two populations from Little River Canyon National Preserve. These flooding events are influenced by prevailing weather patterns and could be increased by increases in frequency and intensity of storms or, similarly, decreased by increases in drought conditions. Because of their periodic exposure to intense scouring flood events, streambank sites are considered naturally transient (Service 2014), and sites may be recolonized from extant upstream and/or upland sites, although the likelihood and timing of such recolonization is unknown.

Factor B: overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes.

Green pitcher plant populations remain the targets of illegal poaching activities, particularly in Alabama, where locations of sites are well-known (e.g., Thompson 2020; Byrd 2022), but the overall severity of this threat has declined since the species was listed.

Factor C: disease or predation.

Disease and predation were not considered significant threats when the species was listed, and we have no indication that this has changed.

Factor D: inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

Green pitcher plant's legal and regulatory protections remain largely unchanged since completion of the last 5-year review with the species receiving some legal protections in Georgia and North Carolina. Collection of green pitcher plants on public lands without a permit is prohibited in Georgia under the Georgia Wildflower Preservation Act of 1973. North Carolina General Statute 106-202.12-202.19, also known as the Plant Protection and Conservation Act, authorizes the State to establish a list of protected plants—which includes green pitcher plant as an endangered species—and regulate the collection, sale, and transport of plants on this list. Tennessee has also proposed listing the species under applicable state authorities as an endangered species (Tennessee State Wildlife Action Plan Team 2015), although green pitcher plant has not been found in the state since before the species was listed (Service 2014). While the species does not receive any specific legal protections from state laws in Alabama, plants are eligible to receive conservation funding from the Service pursuant to section 6 of the Act in Alabama. Green pitcher plant is included in State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) in Alabama (Priority 1 – Highest Conservation Concern; Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 2025), Georgia (Highest Conservation Concern; Kruse et al. 2025), North Carolina (Endangered; North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission 2025), and Tennessee (a Tier 4 species of Greatest Conservation Need; Tennessee State Wildlife Action Plan Team 2015). SWAPs do not mandate specific conservation actions or guarantee funding of such actions for green pitcher plant; however, inclusion within SWAPs informs and promotes conservation of green pitcher plant by highlighting and focusing attention on the conservation needs of the species and its habitats. In addition, green pitcher plant was recently ranked as a species of very high conservation concern in the recently completed *Southeastern Plants RSGCN* [*Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need*] *List* (Radcliffe et al. 2023), a regional cooperative effort funded by the Service to identify and assess plant conservation needs, improve conservation of these species, and inform development of SWAPs within the greater southeastern region. Green pitcher plant also continues to be included in Appendix I of the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES 2024), which limits international trade of species listed pursuant to the treaty. Inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms is not considered to pose a significant threat to the species.

Factor E: other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

Many populations of green pitcher plant exist in small, isolated populations genetically isolated from one another by the inability of green pitcher plant pollinators to traverse long distances

(Folkerts 1992; Service 1994; Folkerts 1999). Development and associated habitat destruction can destroy green pitcher plant colonies/populations, eliminate or degrade suitable habitat, increase fragmentation and isolation of populations, and limit natural dispersal to new sites. Moreover, sexual reproduction of small, isolated green pitcher plant populations may also be pollinator-limited (Folkerts 1999), which reduces pollen and gene flow among plants and can reduce reproductive success. Bumblebee movement may be hindered by roads (Bhattacharya et al. 2003). Thus, increased road construction and expansion associated with increased development may further exacerbate the negative effects of pollinator-limitation for some green pitcher plant populations.

As summarized by Godt and Hamrick (1996), small population sizes have been associated with low genetic diversity and reduced fitness in a variety of plant species. Within green pitcher plant populations, genetic diversity is relatively low and related to population size and geographic isolation. Specifically, small and isolated populations exhibit less genetic diversity than larger, less isolated populations (Godt and Hamrick 1996). Effects of small population size and low genetic diversity on green pitcher plant's fitness have yet to be assessed. However, together, low genetic diversity, small population sizes, and isolation of some populations may limit the species' ability to respond and adapt to stochastic environmental events and future climate change.

Future projections of the southeastern United States are uncertain, but indicate increased temperatures accompanied by reduced average annual precipitation by the end of the century (Joyce et al. 2011). Green pitcher plant populations are expected to be negatively affected if the habitats that the species relies on become drier as a result of such changes (Devall and Parresol 1998; Wilcox 2012). Droughts in the early 2000s resulted in green pitcher plant declines on a preserve in North Carolina (Wilcox 2012). However, hotter and drier conditions could improve conditions for fires (Davenport 2007), which could increase potential for damaging wildfires or influence opportunities for using prescribed fire as a habitat management tool in green pitcher plant habitats. In addition, changes to seasonal weather patterns and frequency and timing of severe weather events could affect the distribution and abundance of plants (Hawkins et al. 2008). If such changes result in increased severity and/or frequency of scouring floods in the Little River (as noted in Factor A, above), remaining green pitcher plant streambank sites and future recruitment to streambank habitats may be negatively impacted.

Synthesis

Green pitcher plant is an herbaceous, carnivorous flowering plant endemic to the southeastern United States. The species is extant in northeastern Alabama (4 counties), northern Georgia (1 county), and southwestern North Carolina (1 county). Green pitcher plant historically occurred in Tennessee but has not been observed since before the species was listed in 1979. There are currently 14 extant populations, which is a decline of 2 extant populations compared with the 2014 5-year review but is unchanged from the 2020 5-year review. Eight populations occur at least in part on conservation lands and receive enhanced protections from development and habitat destruction compared with plants not located on conservation lands. Green pitcher plant conservation efforts have been engaged in and/or funded by the Service, National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, universities, state Plant Conservation Alliances, and various state agencies. Although poaching threats have lessened in recent years, due to its rarity, green pitcher

plant still remains a target for illegal collection and trade. In addition, green pitcher plant faces potential habitat loss—particularly on private, unprotected lands—and habitat degradation via inadequate and inconsistent habitat management and consequent encroachment of competing vegetation. Habitat management (e.g., prescribed fire, removal of competing vegetation) has contributed to the species' survival throughout its historic range. Continued habitat management is needed at all populations to maintain the open conditions that green pitcher plant requires, as well as to control competing vegetation and promote seedling recruitment. Continued and improved monitoring is needed to adequately understand and assess the status, trends, and threats to green pitcher plant, particularly for populations occurring on public and conservation lands. Conservation of the remaining populations requires continued support and cooperation of private landowners, without which, these populations may decline and become extirpated. Due to ongoing threats and the current condition of the species, green pitcher plant continues to meet the definition of an endangered species.

RECOMMENDED FUTURE ACTIVITIES

A detailed discussion of recovery criteria and actions is presented in the species' Recovery Plan (Service 1994). During this status review, new and/or targeted potential recovery activities were identified and are listed below. These actions are recommended to support and promote recovery of green pitcher plant. Recommendation numbers are for convenient reference only and do not imply prioritization of any activity over others.

Recovery Activities

1. Continue cooperative, voluntary efforts to permanently protect, manage (including the use of prescribed fire), and monitor existing habitats and populations, including the development and implementation of management plans, as needed.
2. Expand *ex situ* preservation of genetic stock to represent all populations with increased emphasis placed on preserving and safeguarding genetically distinct individuals (genets) within and across populations.

Monitoring and Research Activities

1. Study and evaluate efficacy of a variety of fire regimes and alternative management strategies to prescribed fire, such as hand clearing, mowing, and limited herbicide application.
2. Characterize genetic diversity and representation of current *ex situ* safeguarded collections.
3. Expand conservation genetics work to include all populations and determine effective population sizes.

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RESULTS / SIGNATURES

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Status Review of Green Pitcher Plant

Status Recommendation:

On the basis of this review, we recommend the following status for this species (50 CFR § 424.11). A 5-year review presents a recommendation of the species' status. Any change to the status requires a separate rulemaking process that includes public review and comment, as defined in the Act.

- ☐ Downlist to Threatened
- ☐ Uplist to Endangered
- ☐ Delist:
  - ☐ *The species is extinct*
  - ☐ *The species is recovered*
  - ☐ *New information indicates the species does not meet the definition of an endangered or threatened species*
  - ☐ *The listed entity does not meet the statutory definition of a species*
- ☒ No change needed

FIELD OFFICE APPROVAL:

Field Supervisor, Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Approve JAMES AUSTIN Digitally signed by JAMES AUSTIN Date: 2025.07.11 09:28:19 -05'00'