



Gierisch mallow in the Arizona desert | Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gierisch mallow listed as endangered species, critical habitat identified

ST. GEORGE - On Tuesday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the desert plant Gierisch mallow as a protected species under the Endangered Species Act and identified areas important to the species recovery. The final rule, published in the Federal Register, maps and other details about the plant are available online or by contacting the FWS Arizona Ecological Service Office at 602-242-0210.

Estimated location of Gierisch mallow populations on the Utah-Arizona border | Image courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

According to an FWS press release dated Aug. 13, “Native plants are important for their ecological, economic and aesthetic values. Plants play an important role in development of crops that resist disease, insects and drought. Plants can also be used to develop natural pesticides.”

Found primarily on federal land in Utah and Arizona, Gierisch mallow is a perennial, orange-flowered plant that grows up to 3.4 feet tall. Eighteen known populations of the plant — 17 on Bureau of Land Management and one on Arizona State Land Department-administered land — are found in northern Mohave County, Ariz. and southern Washington County.

A total of 12,822 acres presently occupied by Gierisch mallow have been designated as critical habitat. “Critical habitat” is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species. Primary threats to Gierisch mallow include gypsum mining, unauthorized off-road vehicle use and other recreational activities.

An economic analysis of the effects of critical habitat designation projects \$3,300 in annual costs, primarily from federal administrative efforts in addition to basic Endangered Species Act consultation costs. The economic analysis and environmental assessment that helped inform the determination of critical habitat will be available shortly.

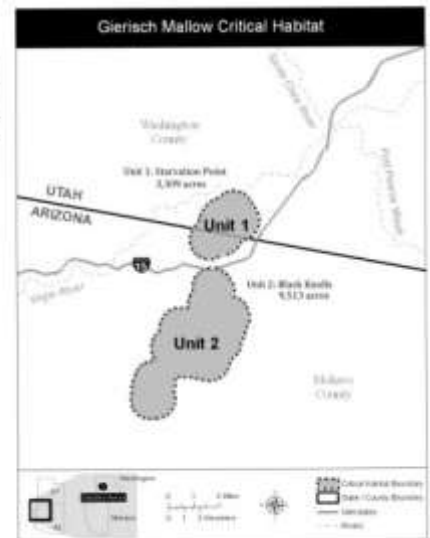
Gierisch mallow has been a polarizing public issue in recent years, specifically when preservation efforts threatened the development of a gypsum mine in Washington County

“We have no information on the historical range of this species because it is a newly discovered plant. Currently, there are 18 known populations of the Gierisch mallow restricted to less than approximately 180 ha (448 ac) in Arizona and Utah. The main populations in Arizona are located south of the Black Kevils, approximately 18.3 km (12 mi) southwest of St. George, Utah, with the southernmost population of this group being on the edge of Black Rock Gulch near Mohave Mountain.

“There is another population, approximately 4.8 kilometers (3 mi) (30.5 mi) north of the Black Kevils, on Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) lands near the Arizona/Utah State line. The Utah population is located on BLM lands within 3.2 km (2 mi) of the Arizona/Utah State line, near the Arizona population on ASLD land.

“There are no other known populations of the Gierisch mallow.”

- From the proposal from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the location of Gierisch Mallow populations.



Gierisch mallow has been a polarizing public issue in recent years, specifically when preservation efforts threatened the development of a gypsum mine in Washington County owned by Good Earth Minerals in the summer of 2012. The mine has since been operating as normal. As this report is published, representatives from Good Earth Minerals were not available to comment on any impact the listing of the Gierisch mallow as endangered may have on their operation.

“This plant exists nowhere else in the world, and small populations like this are at extra risk of extinction,” said Taylor Jones, endangered species advocate for Wild Earth Guardians, the organization that petitioned Gierisch mallow as an endangered species in 2007. “We’re glad the service is heeding the science and protecting this unique species.”

“This is another example of the Endangered Species Act run amok. This is a subspecies of the mallow plant that is all over,” Washington County Commissioner Alan Gardner said. “This listing is the result of lawsuit settlements with the feds agreeing to list 250 species. The mallow is part of that group.”