



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region 4

Recovering Large-Flowered Skullcap Downlisted from Endangered to Threatened

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The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) today announced that recovery efforts have enabled it to downlist the [large-flowered skullcap](#), a mountainous plant that produces a blue and white flower, from endangered to threatened status under the [Endangered Species Act](#).

The skullcap, found in northwestern Georgia and southeastern Tennessee, was first listed as endangered in 1986. The recovery of the species to threatened status is a result of the dedicated work of a number partners including natural resource agencies in Tennessee and Georgia, the Tennessee River Gorge Trust, the University of Tennessee, the Tennessee Aquarium, and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

“The large-flowered skullcap shows us that the Endangered Species Act works to bring species back from the brink of extinction,” said Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director of the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#). “Through continued efforts, we hope we will eventually be able to delist the skullcap altogether.”

A species is listed as endangered when it is in imminent danger of extinction. The less-critical threatened designation means the species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The plant’s recovery plan stipulates that downlisting the species to threatened would be possible when there were at least 25 discrete populations or the number of protected and managed populations is 10 or more. Both criteria for downlisting have been met. There are 48 known populations and 11 protected populations throughout the species’ range.

Since the large-flowered skullcap was listed, many federal and state agencies and private organizations have searched for, and protected, populations of this plant. The Tennessee Valley Authority annually surveys known populations and conducts searches for additional populations. The National Park Service also monitors populations on its lands. Both the Tennessee and Georgia Natural Heritage Inventories have conducted surveys that discovered new populations. The Tennessee River Gorge Trust now owns and protects some of the largest

populations.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville has conducted studies to learn more about the species genetics and how it responds to management techniques such as prescribed burning. These actions all have provided a strong foothold for the continued recovery of the plant.

The large-flowered skullcap (*Scutellaria montana*) is a perennial herb with solitary, erect, square stems usually from 12 to 20 inches tall. It is typically found on rocky, dry slopes, ravines, and stream bottom forests in the ridges, valleys and Cumberland Plateau of northwestern Georgia (Dade, Floyd, Chattooga, Gordon, Catoosa, and Walker Counties) and adjacent southeastern Tennessee (Hamilton, Marion, and Sequatchie Counties).

The biggest threat to the species continues to be habitat loss and alteration. The Service will work with its partners both to manage known populations and seek new populations of the species.

The Service published the decision to downlist the large-flowered skullcap in today's Federal Register. Please visit the web site at www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System that encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes or fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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