

Summary of:

2008 Surveys for Mardon Skipper (*Polites mardon*)  
at Hunter Creek ACEC

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During May and June of 2008, surveys for Mardon skipper (*Polites mardon*) were conducted at Hunter Creek ACEC in Curry County, Oregon on lands administered by the Coos Bay District of the Bureau of Land Management. The surveys were conducted by Dana Ross of Corvallis, Oregon, under a contract funded through the Oregon/Washington BLM & Region 6 Forest Service Interagency Special Status/Sensitive Species Program (ISSSSP). This document incorporates the report of survey methods and results Dana submitted to Coos Bay BLM.

The Mardon skipper is listed as a Federal Candidate Species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and sensitive under the BLM special status species program. BLM 6840 - Special Status Species Management policy objectives are: To ensure that actions requiring authorization or approval by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM or Bureau) are consistent with the conservation needs of special status species and do not contribute to the need to list any special status species, either under provisions of the ESA or other provisions of this policy. These surveys help insure BLM is meeting those objectives.

In 2008 Mardon skippers were located for the first time during surveys in what are delineated as Hunter Creek ACEC meadows #3 and #5. Future surveys are recommended by Dana Ross to monitor this newly identified population and to establish its geographical boundary. He also recommends annual surveys to determine the population's size and to track it over time.

Meadow restoration has occurred in these meadows over the past two years, and while no cause-and-effect can be established, the restoration will potentially benefit this population through expansion of the open meadow.

All data from surveys will be electronically housed in GeoBOB, the geographical information system for biological observations for the OR/WA BLM.

We would like to acknowledge the ISSSSP for funding these surveys and its coordinators, Kelli Van Norman and Robb Huff, for their invaluable support. This project would not have occurred otherwise.

Mardon Skipper Surveys at Hunter Creek ACEC in 2008:  
A Summary Report



Photo by Holly Witt

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Surveys for Mardon skipper (*Polites mardon*) have taken place several times over the past few years at Hunter Creek ACEC (Curry County, Oregon), but it was not until mid-May of this year (2008) that its presence was documented there. The spring of 2008 included prolonged cool weather and late snowfall throughout much of the Pacific Northwest. This resulted in a delayed flight season and lower than average numbers for many spring-flying butterfly populations. It is likely that past surveys at Hunter Creek were conducted too late in the season to detect Mardon skipper, thus it is recommended that future survey and monitoring efforts begin with the first warm, sunny days starting in early May, given typical spring weather conditions.

During 2008, the Mardon skipper population at Hunter Creek ACEC was actively flying from May 17<sup>th</sup> until at least June 12<sup>th</sup>. The population was discovered on the afternoon of May 17<sup>th</sup> when several fresh males were observed at the lower end of Meadow #3 in association with abundant bunchgrasses and diverse nectar sources on shallow serpentine soils. Skippers were observed visiting flowers of cat's ear lily and a violet and were also seen perching on low rocks and patches of bare soil. The sight was visited a second time on June 2<sup>nd</sup> with biologist Holly Witt when under increasingly overcast conditions several more males and females were observed. A third visit was made by Witt (personal communication; not reported in detail here) on June 12<sup>th</sup> when Mardon skipper was observed more widely within Meadow #3, as well as in Meadow #5. If one assumes, logically, that the flight of Mardon skipper at Hunter Creek was somewhat delayed during 2008, the flight period of this insect can be predicted to occur from early May through early June during years with more normal spring conditions.

A more thorough assessment of this population is needed. Searches should be made throughout all potential habitats in the area to establish the geographical boundaries of the population. A population estimate should be conducted annually, not only to determine the present size of the population, but to track it over time. Observations of adult behavior, nectar plant and larval hostplant use and threats to these butterflies will aid in understanding their ecology and will help to conserve this rare population.

Finally, it should be made clear that the taxonomic relationship of this population to those known from Del Norte County, California and from the southern Cascades of Oregon has not been resolved. A modest series of specimens – created from a few individuals taken over each of the next few years – will be required to clarify this.

## PHOTOGRAPHS



Meadow #3 - Location of initial discovery of Mardon skipper at Hunter Creek ACEC.



Meadow #3 – Bunchgrass and flowers in area used by Mardon skipper.