

# Endangered Species Act 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Success Stories Fassett's Locoweed



Fassett's locoweed (*Oxytropis campestris* var. *chartacea*) is a rare member of the legume family endemic only to the state of Wisconsin. This species was listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1988.

Fassett's locoweed was first observed and described in Wisconsin in 1928 from a lake in northwest Wisconsin. It was again recorded in Wisconsin from several locations in the central part of the state in the mid 1930's and again from several more central state locations in the late 1960's, 1978, and 1990. On the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest the plant is known from two lakes on the Washburn Ranger District in northwest Wisconsin. Since the sites were discovered, the number of individuals within the populations have fluctuated from year to year due to environmental conditions such as drought. By the mid-2000's the number of individual plants at the two lake sites had been decreasing for many years. At one site the plant had not been observed in five years and plans were made with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to re-establish the plant in its former habitat. Before the plants could be re-established a population boom occurred at the site due to low water conditions exposing former lake bed habitat. This allowed 10,000's of individual Fassett's locoweed to become established from previously submerged seeds.



Figure 2. Blooming Fassett's locoweed plant showing clump forming tendency and typical purple flowers. Habitat for the plant is along small, landlocked, hardwater sandy seepage lakes that have fluctuating shorelines in areas of sandy glacial drift. Photo taken by Matt Bushman in June of 2011.



Figure 1. Fassett's locoweed thriving on former lake bed habitat in northwest Wisconsin. Photo taken by Matt Bushman in June of 2010.

In addition to Fassett's locoweed colonizing the open habitat of the former lake bed, other native and some non-native invasive species became established. Over the past four years the Forest Service has been working to eradicate non-native invasive species from Fassett's locoweed habitat thereby helping to preserve the rare species. Also, efforts to educate lake owners who own property on the lakes where Fassett's locoweed occurs have been successful in protecting the plants from damage.

As of January 2013, wetter conditions over the past year have caused water levels to rise at the two lakes where Fassett's locoweed occurs. This has displaced some individuals of Fassett's locoweed, but has also preserved the seeds until the next drought cycle. Even though the number of Fassett's locoweed individuals are declining, the Forest Service will continue to educate lake owners and control non-native invasive species in Fassett's locoweed habitat in order to help this unique plant thrive.



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