

Endangered Species Act 40th Anniversary Success Stories Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow



Sidalcea oregana var. *calva* (Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow; Figure 1), was listed as endangered on December 22, 1999 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 1999), is endemic to the area surrounding Leavenworth in Chelan County, eastern Washington. The populations are generally small in terms of both the number of plants and the amount of area covered by each population. Just five populations are known, and four of these five populations number from only eight individuals to a few hundred. The largest of the known populations, Camas Meadows, has approximately 11,000 individuals in a mixture of private, State, and Federal lands (Figure 2). Of the remaining populations, one is on Federal lands, one is on State land, and two are on private lands. Critical habitat was designated for this species on September 6, 2001 (USFWS 2001). A recovery plan was approved in 2004.

The primary threats to *S. oregana* var. *calva* include habitat fragmentation, degradation, or loss due to conversion of native wetlands to orchards and other agricultural uses and rural residential development; altered hydrology; competition from native and nonnative plants; recreational impacts; woody plant encroachment; seed predation by weevils; and some activities associated with wildfire suppression. To a lesser extent the species is threatened by road construction and timber harvest and their potential impacts, including sedimentation and changes in hydrology. The species is highly vulnerable to extirpation from demographic factors or random, naturally occurring events due to the small size of most of the remaining populations.



Figure 2. *Sidalcea oregana* var. *calva* habitat at Camas Meadows showing one of the outflow sloughs. *Balsamorhiza sagittata* (arrowleaf balsamroot) is common in the meadow, which also supports the very rare *Delphinium viridescens* (Wenatchee larkspur). Photo by Rod Clausnitzer.



Figure 1. *Sidalcea oregana* var. *calva*. Photo by Ben Legler.

Much progress has been made in meeting recovery plan goals. The large Camas Meadows population was protected in large part when the state of Washington established the Camas Meadows Natural Area Preserve. Management actions here include control of nonnative species and access by the public, maintaining and restoring natural hydrology, and addressing the impacts of roads and fire suppression activities in the larger drainage basin. This site is now very carefully monitored by a collaborative group that includes the WA Dept. of Natural Resources (Natural Heritage Program), The Nature Conservancy, RareCare, USFWS, and US Forest Service. A consistent monitoring protocol that began in 2011 will reveal whether management actions are successfully sustaining this large population, and suggest correction as needed. The smaller nearby population on USFS lands has occasionally been damaged by off road vehicles, and was recently fenced to prevent this. The population is doing well although encroachment suggests that prescribed fire might be salutary. The Okanogan-Wenatchee botany staff are weighing this and other options to sustain that site. Designation as an endangered species was the catalyst to build the partnerships that are securing the future for this beautiful Washington endemic plant.



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