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Protection Sought for Sagebrush Sea Inhabitants
Fifth Week of BioBlitz Focused on Vast, Neglected Sagebrush Grasslands

Santa Fe, NM – WildEarth Guardians’ BioBlitz, an eight-week campaign to induce the U.S. Department of Interior to more aggressively respond to the biodiversity crisis, continues this week with “Sagebrush Sea Week.” This week the organization will initiate actions to protect butterflies, beetles, a springsnail, a fish and a flower that live in the Sagebrush Sea.

“The Sagebrush Sea, one of the most used and abused landscapes in North America, is also home to hundreds of diverse and imperiled species,” said Mark Salvo, Director of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign. “We must act to protect them before it’s too late.”

The BioBlitz began on December 28, the 36th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, in tribute to the law’s role in protecting biodiversity and in celebration of 2010 as the United Nation’s International Year of Biodiversity. Guardians will take action to obtain Endangered Species Act protection for imperiled species on each of the 36 consecutive working days of the BioBlitz.

Conservation actions during “Sagebrush Sea Week” are:

- January 25: a petition to protect **ten Great Basin butterflies** under the Endangered Species Act. These butterflies occur in small populations and in narrow habitats that are susceptible to a variety of threats. Habitats for some are threatened by water development and groundwater withdrawal in southern and central Nevada.
- January 26: a lawsuit to compel federal protection for the **Pipe Springs Cryptantha**, a plant that occurs on the southern edge of the Sagebrush Sea, near Fredonia, Arizona. Threats to this rare, one-foot-tall flower include off-road vehicle use, livestock grazing and trampling, development and even garbage dumping.
- January 27: a petition to obtain Endangered Species Act critical habitat designation for the **Banbury Springs Limpet**, a small, aquatic snail found in four isolated freshwater spring complexes along the Snake River in central Idaho. The species has never been found anywhere else, and a recent assessment concluded that the snail remains imperiled throughout its limited range.
- January 28: a lawsuit to compel federal protection for the **Northern Leatherside Chub**, a rare minnow that swims in the Bear River and Snake River drainages in Utah, Wyoming, Nevada and Idaho. Chub populations are declining due to habitat degradation caused by irrigation, water diversion, and competition and predation by nonnative fish.
- January 29: a petition to protect **six sand dune beetles** under the Endangered Species Act. The beetles are endemic to dunes in Nevada that are also favorite areas for off-road vehicle use. The six scarabs are threatened by limited populations, restricted range, and mismanagement of their habitat.

Despite its size, the Sagebrush Sea is one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. WildEarth Guardian's report, *The Shrinking Sagebrush Sea* (www.sagebrushsea.org/land_shrinking_sagebrush_sea.htm), found that less than five percent of the landscape is afforded some level of federal protection.

Each week of the BioBlitz has a theme. Previous weeks were "Climate Week," "E.O. Wilson Week," "Prairie Week," and "On the Prowl Week."

WildEarth Guardians has been at the forefront of endangered species enforcement in the U.S. The group is a formal partner in the United Nation's Year of Biodiversity (www.cbd.int/2010/welcome), in which "The world is invited to take action in 2010 to safeguard the variety of life on earth: biodiversity."

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