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## Rare Otoy butterfly doesn't make 'endangered' list

BY MIKE LEE

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The Thorne's hairstreak butterfly -- found exclusively on and around Otoy Mountain in southern San Diego County -- isn't imperiled enough to need protection under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said Tuesday after a months-long assessment.

"Over 95 percent of the butterfly's habitat is currently conserved and managed," the agency said in a statement. "Additionally, we have no evidence supporting declines in the butterfly's range or abundance throughout its known distribution."



/ U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE /P>

Thorne's hairstreak butterfly

Thorne's hairstreak butterfly has reddish-brown wings with dark brown shading. It lays its eggs only on Tecate cypress trees. Adults are known to feed on a variety of nectar sources, including California buckwheat, Ramona lilac, deerweed, and narrowleaf milkweed.

In 2004, the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity and conservationist David Hogan asked the service to protect the hairstreak. In April 2010, federal officials said such federal safeguards may be warranted but their latest decision finds otherwise.

"Past wildfires in San Diego County show that we could lose these beautiful creatures in one strong blaze," Hogan said last year. "Endangered Species Act protection provides a crucial safety net to protect these butterflies for future generations."

Surveys after the 2003 and 2007 fires show that Thorne's hairstreak butterfly's current known range is greater in size than its known historical range, federal officials said.

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They noted that the butterfly currently occupies several locations in the southwest quadrant of Otay Mountain that were not previously known. Additionally, a newly colonized butterfly location was discovered in 2010 in recently created habitat within the Otay River Valley.

Across the areas scarred by the 2003 and 2007 fires, federal researchers said they had evidence of Tecate cypress regrowth and butterflies.

"This indicates that the butterfly is relatively resilient to fire impacts because it can recolonize burned areas, and in some cases persist within mapped fire perimeters," federal biologists said. "Furthermore, recent butterfly observations in created habitat within the Otay River Valley indicate this butterfly can move fairly considerable distances and colonize new stands of Tecate cypress at lower elevations."

A copy of the Fish and Wildlife Service decision can be viewed online at the Federal Register Public Inspection Page. The official copy will be posted on February 23, 2011 at <http://www.regulations.gov> under Docket No. FWS-R8-ES-2010-0016.

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