

# Monarch butterfly protections could restrict GMOs

Federal officials say threatened status may be warranted

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
EO Media Group

Federal regulators think monarch butterflies may be a threatened species, which could eventually provide biotechnology critics with a new justification for restricting genetically engineered crops.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently said the butterfly may warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act, finding that environmental groups have furnished "substantial" data that indicates federal protection for the insect may be necessary.

Environmentalists claim that widespread adoption of "Roundup Ready" biotech crops resistant to glyphosate herbicides has increased usage of these chemicals, depleting the monarch's milkweed habitat and drastically reducing its populations.

The Endangered Species Act is a "very powerful" tool that environmentalists hope to use against glyphosate and, by proxy, herbicide-tolerant biotech crops, said Jay Vroom, executive director of Croplife America, an agribusiness group.

"It's a real concern, without a doubt," he said. "To single out

## AN ANALYSIS

the GE resistance and glyphosate technology is suspect and does not comport with scientific trends."

The petition to list monarch butterflies as threatened is a new tactic in a broader campaign to discourage the cultivation of genetically modified organisms, said Damien Schiff, an attorney specializing in property rights and environmental law.

In the past, pesticide opponents have successfully used the Endangered Species Act to require the federal government to increase its scrutiny of various chemicals and limit their uses, he said.

"This is an element of the same general strategy," Schiff said.

If environmentalists succeed in obtaining a listing for the monarch butterfly, it would implicate the spraying of glyphosate and other herbicides on biotech crops across the large geographic area occupied by the species, Schiff said.

Monarch butterflies in the Midwest — where they're most populous — overwinter in mountainous areas of Mexico, while those in the West overwinter on the California Coast.

"That raises the possibility of a huge critical habitat designation," Schiff said.

Biotech critics were dealt a major legal setback in 2013, when the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided that the USDA lacked authority to regulate genetically en-



Courtesy of Elizabeth A. Sellers, USGS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently said the monarch butterfly may warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act.

gineered crops that are not plant pests.

That opinion undermined the effectiveness of lawsuits challenging USDA's environmental analysis of transgenic crops. Such cases had previously hindered the commercialization of "Roundup Ready" alfalfa and sugar beets.

Biotech critics have since shifted their approach. Recent efforts, for example, have focused on encouraging states and local governments to label or restrict genetically engineered crops.

Environmental groups say their ESA listing petition is motivated by a desire to halt the steep decline in monarch populations rather than an anti-biotech agenda.

Over the past two decades, the number of monarchs has dropped from roughly 1 billion to less than 35 million, their petition claims.

Even so, the environmental groups believe the main hazard facing the insect is the loss of summer breeding habitat due to GMO-related glyphosate applications, said Tierra Curry, senior scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the petitioners.

"We think one of the largest threats right now is increased pesticide use," she said.

Defenders of pesticides and biotechnology discount this argument, pointing out that farm-

ers have removed milkweed from their fields prior to the advent of biotechnology or glyphosate.

"We've been controlling milkweed a lot longer than Roundup has been available," said Vroom of Croplife America.

The petitioners argue that unlike older herbicides, glyphosate kills the perennial plant's roots and prevents it from regenerating. The chemical is also much more prevalent now that major commodity crops can withstand it, they say.

"We do see a very strong correlation," said Sarina Jepsen, endangered species program director for the Xerces Society, another petitioner. "I just don't think farmers were (previously) as effectively controlling milkweed."

If the species is listed, a possible remedy could involve farmers setting aside reserves free of biotech crops resistant to glyphosate, allowing milkweed to recover, she said.

The USFWS is unlikely to take drastic measures, said Curry. "I don't think the Service is going to come out and tell people they can't grow Roundup Ready crops."

Possible restrictions would also not be immediate — the agency probably won't decide whether or not to list the monarch until 2016, and then require another year to finalize the rules, she said.

The pesticide industry does not believe a listing is justified and plans to oppose the listing petition, said Vroom. "This is another marathon journey."

# Wintertime at Proxy Falls

By **ZACH URNESS**  
Statesman Journal

MCKENZIE BRIDGE — Take a hike on Proxy Falls Trail during summer or autumn, and there's a good chance you'll have company.

The two waterfalls on this easy hike off McKenzie Pass Highway are among the most frequently photographed in Oregon and often draw a crowd on weekends.

Come back in winter, though, when the highway is closed to vehicles and the preferred mode of transportation is skis or snowshoes, and it's a far different experience.

The journey to Proxy Falls is longer, colder and sometimes requires a bit of route-finding during winter.

But it's also more rewarding, offering the chance to travel a highway that becomes a tunnel through snowy forest and experience Upper Proxy Falls (126 feet) and Lower Proxy Falls (226 feet) ornamented by icicles.

The route, which includes stretches of highway and trail, is seven miles out and back with 1,100 feet of climb.

On the right day — after a fresh dose of snow — a winter trip to Proxy Falls Trail is far better than anything you'd experience in summer.

## Waiting for snow

One of my favorite activities during winter is a sport known as "Winter Waterfall Hunting."

The idea is pretty simple: Visit as many waterfalls as possible covered with ice and snow during the year's coldest months.

The spray of a winter waterfall is so refreshing it clears all the cobwebs from your brain. It makes a fun scavenger hunt when combined with snowshoeing, skiing or snowmobiling,



AP Photo/Statesman-Journal, Zach Urness

Ice covers part of the Upper Proxy Falls, located near McKenzie Bridge, about 60 miles east of Eugene, Jan. 1.



AP Photo/Statesman-Journal, Zach Urness

Hikers make their way up Highway 242, which is closed during the winter, to the Proxy Falls trail, near McKenzie Bridge.

and for photographers, it creates unique scenes.

The problem last season and the beginning of this year has been crummy snow conditions. Proxy Falls — along with many of Oregon's great waterfalls — sits at the 3,100- to 3,200-

foot range, which these past few seasons has been too low for consistent snow.

I planned winter trips to Proxy Falls multiple times last year, only to cancel them when the weather brought rain instead of snow.

And so, when a system of mid-elevation snow finally arrived at the end of December, I decided to spend New Year's Day fulfilling my resolution to see Proxy Falls encased by snow and ice on the first day of the year.

**IF YOU GO ...**

**Proxy Falls in Winter**

**General location:** East of McKenzie Bridge, southeast of Santiam Junction

**Elevation:** 2,100 (trailhead) to 3,200 (waterfalls)

**Information:** McKenzie Bridge Ranger District, Oakridge, (541) 822-3381

**Activity:** Snowshoe, cross country ski or hike

**Distance:** 7 miles out and back

**Elevation climb:** 1,100 feet

**Route:** 2.6 miles up closed McKenzie Pass Highway 242, 1.8 miles on Proxy Falls Trail, 2.6 miles back down McKenzie Pass Highway.

**Directions:** From Eugene, follow Highway 126 east, past McKenzie Bridge and Paradise Campground, and turn right onto McKenzie Pass Highway 242. Follow to the gate and park on the right. (You can also take Highway 22 east of Salem and head south on Highway 126 to the same place. The route from Eugene is about 10 minutes quicker).

**Trailhead coordinates:** N44 10.062 W121 57.966

## The journey

The trip to Proxy Falls during winter is simple enough.

From Highway 126 — coming from either Santiam Junction or Eugene — simply turn onto Highway 242 and follow it until you hit the snow gate. There's a small parking area on the side of the road.

The trick once you arrive is deciding what equipment to bring. The snow gate's elevation is 2,100 feet, but the waterfalls are at 3,200 feet, which means you're likely to pick up a fair amount of snow during the trip.

When snowpack is minimal and there's a good path, all you really need are waterproof boots. In deeper snow — when there's significant coverage at the gate — snowshoes or skis are best.

"Many times the snow line is not all the way down to the gate, which makes it more like a hike," said Tyson Cross, winter recreation programs manager with Willamette National Forest.

My day started with plenty of snow, so I tossed on snowshoes right away and kept them on the entire time.

From the gate, the route follows the highway for 2.6 miles before you arrive at Proxy Falls Trailhead, marked by signs and a restroom.

The loop trail branches off to both the left and right.

I headed left, the quickest route to the waterfalls, and started breaking trail among forest and lava fields. The trail isn't marked by blue diamonds, so if you're the first one out after a big snow dump, as I was, staying on the correct route is a challenge. I was also glad to have snowshoes, since there were many downed trees that would have been a major hassle in skis.

At the first junction (0.4 miles from the Proxy Trailhead), stay left to visit Upper Proxy Falls, a 126-foot cascade. Fed by a spring, this waterfall doesn't thunder but rather slides down mossy tiers into a pool below.

Back to the junction, I headed right and reached a viewpoint of Lower Proxy Falls, a more dramatic 226 feet. It fans out in summer, but was a thin string of silver covered in icicles on my trip.

I made my way carefully down to the base of the falls — the creek had a mostly frozen top — and snapped some pictures, enjoying a winter waterfall that eluded me for over a year.

The cool spray, drifting off icicles into a forest of white was so refreshing that it didn't take long for my brain to feel clean and cobweb-free.

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