Popular Media Analysis for

Graduate Certificate

Environmental Policy

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Fender's blue butterfly (Icaricia icarioides fenderi) is a species native to the Willamette Valley of Oregon and is one of the most iconic examples of a species brought back from the brink of extinction. The article I chose for this assignment was written by CNN about the protection of the butterfly. In 1937, the species was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1989, landing it on the endangered species list (Sottile 2023). This butterfly is only found in Oregon's Willamette Valley, which stretches from Portland to Eugene, covering a 150-mile region. Local conservation efforts partnered with landowners, businesses, and wildlife refuges to downlist the species to "threatened," which will be effective February 13, 2023 (Sottile 2023).

The Fender's butterfly is unique because its adult lifespan is only 10 days, creating a limited window for the species to mate and reproduce. The main threats to their lives are habitat destruction and wildfires. To combat these events, thousands of Kincaid's lupines were planted for the butterflies to lay eggs on, and landowners were educated on how to manage their habitats. The implications of creating habitats allowed the butterfly to increase its population from 3,391 insects in 2000 to 13,700 insects in 2018 (Sottile 2023). This success should not be belittled but, altering the habitat for one species may lead to drawbacks for others. Biologists must continue to uncover what defines a habitat for a wide range of species in order to effectively "reduce the adverse effects of anthropocentric activities while enhancing effects that are positive" (Krausman 2013). It is too soon to tell if any other plants or animals in the Willamette ecosystem will be altered by this demographic shift of the butterfly.

Landowners can have a significant impact on the status of a species. Some landowners, according to Czech and Krausman, do not always support endangered species because listing a

plant or animal in their area can reduce property value (Czech 2001). In the case of the blue butterfly, the conflict did not exist, and instead, landowners came together to play a crucial role in reintroducing the butterfly. The US Fish and Wildlife Service developed a rule to make it easier for landowners to manage the butterflies' habitats (Sottile 2023).

This article is in support of the ESA and attributes the protection of the Fender's blue butterfly to the policies created by the act. Under rule 4(d) the ESA was able to enact "activities that facilitate conserving and managing the butterfly's habitat by creating, restoring, or enhancing native upland prairie or oak savannah" (Sottile 2023). It demonstrates that, while not a perfect system, when the intentions are outlined and policy is effectively implemented, the act can make incredible differences for species. I believe this story needs to be shared further to demonstrate the collective advancements in conservation and protection that can be made when people work together towards a common goal.

My opinion on this remarkable comeback is that it shows that when the government, individuals, and wildlife agencies work together, positive change is possible. If only one party was fighting for these butterflies, it would be possible that they remained endangered. In this instance, human prevention of wildfires allowed habitats to be conserved. If every species on the endangered species list was approached with this collective effort, the list would drastically wither. Alternatively, this article and the conservation of this species did not touch on how the protection of this species affects the environment around it which is also crucial to consider. For example, reducing wildfires and protecting habitats can be beneficial for many species, but there are also environmental benefits to natural wildfires. Wildfires "remove low-growing

underbrush, clean the forest floor of debris, open it up to sunlight, and nourish the soil" (Cal Fire n.d.).

The Fender's blue butterfly has become a symbol of hope and success for conservationists everywhere. After decades of effort, it was successfully removed from the endangered species list, proving that with hard work and dedication, even species on the brink of extinction can be saved. The preservation of this beautiful creature is an important reminder that all life is valuable and worth protecting. It also serves as a powerful example to inspire us to continue our efforts to protect our planet’s fragile biodiversity. Conservationists have worked tirelessly to save this iconic species, and their commitment should serve as motivation for all those who are passionate about preserving our environment. If every species on the endangered list received this cumulative effort, the list could be drastically decreased.

References

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