Mountain golden heather
Hudsonia montana

Mountain golden heather, USFWS

Status: Threatened

Description: Mountain golden heather is a tiny, needle-leaved shrub with yellow flowers. It usually grows about six inches tall, in clumps from four to eight inches across. Occasionally, very vigorous plants form larger patches of a foot or more in length. The plants have the general appearance of a large moss or low juniper, but their branching is more open, their leaves are about one-quarter of an inch long, and the plant is often somewhat yellow-green in color, especially in shaded areas. The flowers appear in early or mid-June, are nearly an inch across, and have five blunt-tipped petals. Viable seeds may remain in the soil over more than one growing season when germination conditions are unfavorable. Mountain golden heather usually begins flowering in its third year and roots vegetatively at the edges once it forms large clumps, after perhaps ten years.

Habitat: Mountain golden heather usually grows on exposed quartzite cliffs at elevations of 2,800 to 4,000 feet.

Range: Mountain golden heather is found in Burke and McDowell Counties, North Carolina.

Listing: Threatened, October, 20, 1980. 45 FR 69360 69363

Critical habitat: Designated, October, 20, 1980. 45 FR 69360 69363

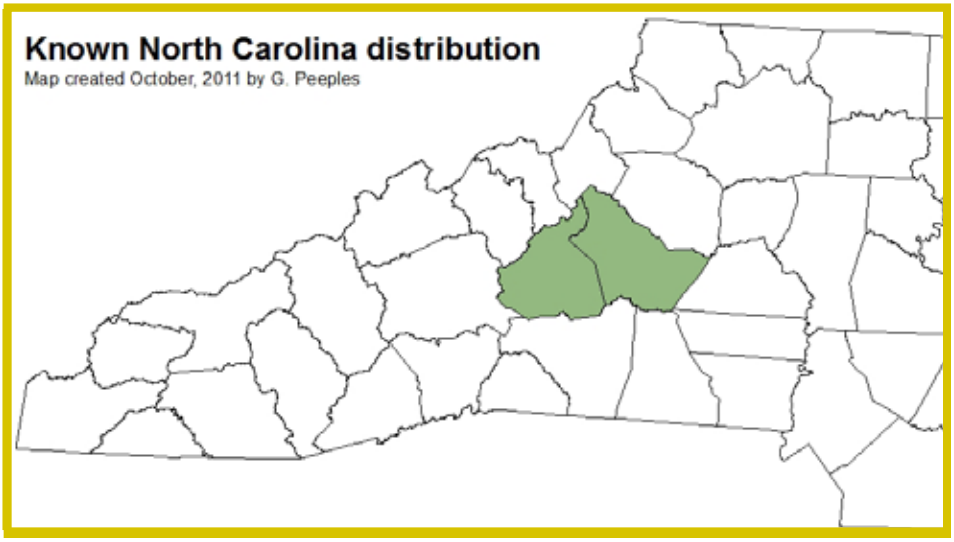
Threats: Intensive recreational use by hikers, climbers, and campers has resulted in a loss of plants due to trampling and soil compaction. Plants have also been taken from the wild by collectors. A major contributor to the decline of this species is the exclusion of natural wildfire from its habitat. Recent studies have shown that the habitat of mountain golden heather is adapted to periodic fire. Wildfire suppression has changed forest composition, allowing shrubs and trees to take over the naturally open habitat required by golden heather.

Why should we be concerned about the loss of species? Extinction is a natural process that has been occurring since long before the appearance of humans. Normally, new species develop through a process known as speciation, at about the same rate other species become extinct. However, because of air and water pollution, forest clearing, loss of wetlands, and other man-induced environmental changes, extinctions are now occurring at a rate that far exceeds the speciation rate.

All living things are part of a complex and interconnected network. We depend on the diversity of plant and animal life for our recreation, nourishment, many of our lifesaving medicines, and the ecological functions they provide. One-quarter of all the prescriptions written in the United States today contain chemicals that were originally discovered in plants and animals. Industry and agriculture are increasingly making use of wild plants, seeking out the remaining wild strain of many common crops, such as wheat and corn, to produce new hybrids that are more resistant to disease, pests, and marginal climatic conditions. Our food crops depend on insects and other animals for pollination.

Healthy forests clean the air and provide oxygen for us to breathe. Wetlands clean water and help minimize the impacts of floods. These services are the foundation of life and depend on a diversity of plants and animals working in concert. Each time a species disappears, we lose not only those benefits we know it provided but other benefits that we have yet to realize.

What you can do to help
Tread lightly and stay on designated trails. Vegetation on popular high mountains has virtually been destroyed by human trampling.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Visit arboretums, botanical gardens, and parks and learn all you can about endangered plants and the causes of their declines.

Don't collect or buy plants collected from wild populations.

Participate in the protection of our remaining wild lands and the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

Prepared by:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Asheville Field Office
160 Zillicoa Street
Asheville, North Carolina 28801
(828) 258 3939

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