

Benton County Special Management Species: Nelson's checkermallow

NELSON'S CHECKERMALLOW (*Sidalcea nelsoniana*) is a perennial plant native to the Willamette Valley with vibrant spires of pink flowers that bloom in June and July.

The Willamette Valley was historically grassy prairie dominated by oak trees. When human development increased, prairieland shrunk which endangered many species. Less than one percent of the original prairie habitat that once existed is still present today!¹

There are at least 23 populations and 39 known subpopulations of Nelson's checkermallow in Benton County; it is found in wet prairie environments in both the Coast Range and the Valley itself.

Nelson's checkermallow can sometimes be spotted along fence lines, ditches, streambeds, roadsides or drainage swales where it can find adequate water and partial protection from drying out.²

Stream straightening and other alterations of stream channels have resulted in habitat loss



Photo: M Miller, BLM

for Nelson's checkermallow as it traditionally requires moist soil to thrive. This has resulted in reduced areas in which plant populations can succeed. Mowing can also damage the plant if it occurs during a period of growth or before the plant is able to release seeds.³

In very small populations of Nelson's checkermallow, there may not be a large enough mix of male and female plants to effectively pollinate one another which can be a limiting factor in the continued success of this species.

SOMETHING BUGGING YOU?

Nelson's checkermallow is an important host or food plant for dozens of insect species, including an array of bees, flies, spiders, butterflies, ants, earwigs, pollen-eating beetles and more. There is a species of weevil that bores holes in the seeds of the plant where larvae hatch and eat their way out, damaging up to 90% of the seeds that the plant produces. This weevil species is also a host for a parasitic wasp. Both the wasp and the weevil are just as rare as Nelson's checkermallow itself. At least one native bee is a specialist just on Nelson's checkermallow.

¹ Black, S. H., and D. M. Vaughan. 2005. Species Profile: *Icaricia icarioides fenderi*. In Shepherd, M. D., D. M. Vaughan, and S. H. Black (Eds). Red List of Pollinator Insects of North America. CD-ROM Version 1 (May 2005). Portland, OR: The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

² Oregon Department of Agriculture. Nelson's Checkermallow Profile. Plant Conservation: Accessed online 5 April 2022. <https://www.oregon.gov/oda/shared/Documents/Publications/PlantConservation/SidalceaNelsonianaProfile.pdf>

³ U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 30 September 1998. "Recovery Plan for the Threatened Nelson's Checker-Mallow." U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland. 72 pp.