

## Benton County Special Management Species: Willamette Daisy

**THE WILLAMETTE DAISY** (*Erigeron decumbens* var. *decumbens*) is a small perennial flower in the sunflower family that can be identified by delicate light purple petals and a bright yellow center. The flower is about the size of a quarter and flowers in June and July.

The Willamette Daisy was thought to be extinct as of 1934, but was resighted in 1980 and is now present at least 33 sites in Benton, Lane, Linn, Marion and Polk counties.

The Willamette daisy was listed as endangered by the State of Oregon under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2000.

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!<sup>1</sup>

Like many prairie species, the Willamette daisy is somewhat reliant on periodic disturbance events that clear overgrowth of other

vegetation. Events like fires clear out competing species and keep the Willamette daisy's habitat open for the plant to grow and obtain sunlight. Willamette daisies primarily grow in well-drained floodplains and upland prairies close to sea level. The Willamette has long taproots which allow it to obtain water deep in the soil and survive dry conditions.

It is the only species of its kind to have purple flowers, and is only found in the Willamette valley.



Photo: J Dillon, USFWS

### FLOWERY SYMBOLISM

Daisies have a lot of cultural and ecological significance. The word 'daisy' comes from the Old English 'Daes eage' which means 'day's eye'. This name came from the fact that daisies close their petals at night and reopen them in the morning light. Like many native flowering plants in Oregon, they are important flowers for pollinators. They might be confused with asters, another purple flowering plant. Because a minimum number of healthy daisy plants are needed for a population to persist, care should be taken not to tramp on, spray, pick, or otherwise disturb these flowers.

<sup>1</sup> 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.