

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

OCTOBER 28, 2004

## Help sought for two rare butterflies

### Wildfires wiped out big part of habitat

by Terry Rodgers

A San Diego environmentalist has petitioned the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to extend federal protection to two butterfly species pushed closer to extinction because of last year's wildfires.

David Hogan of the Center for Biological Diversity said he made the request under the Endangered Species Act to prevent further loss of habitat critical to the survival of the two rare butterflies, the Thorne's hairstreak and Hermes copper.

"The government has known for years that these species were in dire straits but has done nothing," Hogan said. "That inaction is even more appalling given the . . . failure to act following the 2003 wildfires."

Putting the two butterflies on the endangered species list would clear the way for increased government funding for recovery activities and increased conservation activities by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Border Patrol and the state Department of Forestry, according to the petition.

The government is required by law to respond to the petition in 90 days. If the petition is deemed to have merit, the government has a year to determine if listing is warranted. Typically, a minimum of two years of analysis and scientific study is required before a species can be listed.

The possible effects from listing would be more significant for the Hermes copper butterfly because much of its habitat is located on privately owned land desirable to developers, Hogan said.

By contrast, all of the habitat crucial to the Thorne's hairstreak is on public lands that are already protected from development, he said.

"Listing (the Hermes copper) is unlikely to affect individual home builders but has greater potential to cut into the pocket-books of the large-scale developers," Hogan said.

He said that of the two butterflies, the more imperiled is the Thorne's hairstreak, which lost 68 percent of its habitat to the Otay fire, which burned more than 46,000 acres near the U.S.-Mexican border.

The butterfly is dependent on a single host plant, the Tecate cypress tree, to reproduce. With only a few stands of Tecate cypress remaining, the butterfly could be wiped out by a single new fire in the Otay Mountain area, Hogan said.

Before last year's wildfires, biologists estimated there were at least 400 of them at the Crest Ridge Ecological Reserve near Otay Mountain. Surveys this spring turned up fewer than 100, he said.

The petition filed this week is Hogan's second attempt to have the Thorne's hair-

streak listed as endangered. A similar request submitted in 1991 was rejected by the Fish & Wildlife Service.

The Hermes copper butterfly, which ranges from Fallbrook to northern Baja California, is vulnerable to both wildfire and urban development.

The butterfly lost 39 percent of its habitat in last year's wildfires, Hogan said.

To successfully reproduce, the Hermes copper is dependent on a native plant called the spiny redberry, which grows in scattered patches from Fallbrook to Jamul.