



Endangered plant habitat denied

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An endangered plant found only in sandy areas of the Coachella Valley won't get a special habitat designation from the federal government, according to a ruling today.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service denied the Coachella Valley milk vetch critical habitat designation in a rule published in the federal register.

The service said the plant, which lives on loose, wind-blown sand and dunes, is already protected because it lives in habitat that is already protected for the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard.

The service also said a proposed plan to balance development and environmental conservation in the Coachella Valley will also protect the plant. That plan has been in development for about a decade and been delayed numerous times.

Environmental groups that petitioned for the special plant habitat say the ruling is a blow to the milk vetch.

Daniel Patterson of the Center for Biological Diversity said the plant is barely surviving as it is and denying protection is, "keeping it

endangered and on its death bed."

Backers of the plant protection plan the government cites, the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, says the ruling validates their effort.

Jim Sullivan, one of the plan's authors, said the habitat designation would provide, "very little conservation, virtually none."

The plan will not only protect the plant but about 26 other species as well.