

## Effort to protect Shasta County plant grows into one more Shasta Dam controversy

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Shasta snow-wreath has unusual flowers. The white tufts are made mostly of stamens rather than petals. The flowers are on the plant for a only week or so.

An attempt to list as an endangered species a plant found only in Shasta County could put it in the middle of a controversy over raising the height of Shasta Dam.

The California Fish and Game Commission is expected to vote Friday on whether to accept a petition to list the Shasta snow-wreath as an endangered species under state law.



Shasta snow-wreath has unusual flowers. The white tufts are made mostly of stamens rather than petals. The flowers are on the plant for a only week or so. (Photo: Courtesy of Ken DeCamp)

The snow-wreath grows only in Shasta County, and according to the petition, up to 79% of the plant's population — a number disputed by a Redding biologist who has studied the plant — would be threatened by raising the height of the dam.

A California Department of Fish and Wildlife report to the commission says that 19 of 24 "occurrences" of the snow wreath would be affected by raising the height of the dam.

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The commission's action during the meeting would open the door to the state considering whether to list the plant as an endangered species, said Melissa Miller-Henson, the commission's executive director.

However, there would be many more steps ahead before the commission took a final vote as to whether the snow-wreath should be considered endangered, Miller-Hanson said.

"There's a whole lot ahead," Miller-Henson said. The plant would undergo further study and the public would have the opportunity to comment on whether to list the plant as endangered.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has long been interested in raising the height of the dam 18½ feet to increase the amount of water in Lake Shasta.

The petition was submitted by Kathleen Roche, along with the "participation of the California Native Plant Society." They have also asked the federal government to list the snow-wreath as an endangered species.

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Roche could not be reached for comment and officials with the plant society did not immediately respond.

Citing information in the petition, the state's report says other activities around Lake Shasta also potentially threaten the snow-wreath, including recreation, logging, mining and other development.

Even control burns and hand-thinning to reduce fire danger pose a threat to the plant, the report says. The report specifically notes an ongoing 46,356 fuels reduction program around the lake.

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest has plans to burn a portion of that project this month.

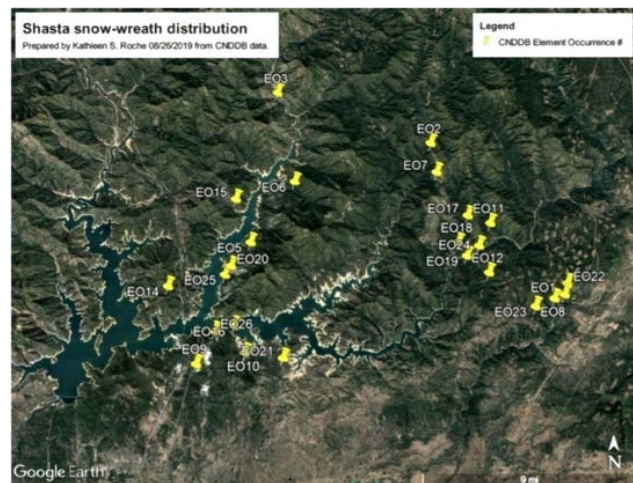
But citing the petition, the report on the snow-wreath says raising the height of the dam would pose particular threats to the plant.

"The petition indicates that the primary threat to Shasta snow-wreath is significant destruction, modification and curtailment of habitat by the proposed project to raise the height of Shasta Dam and other ongoing projects," the report says.

The bureau says raising the height of the dam would increase the high water mark around the lake 20 feet. The plant could also be affected by moving roads, bridges, campgrounds and other facilities to areas above the new high water mark, the state report says.

Len Lindstrand, a wildlife biologist from Redding who was hired to study the plants and animals living around lake, said he has done extensive research on the snow-wreath.

"That was one of the things that occupied a lot of my time," he said of the snow-wreath.



This map, included in a California Department of Fish and Wildlife report on the Shasta snow-wreath, shows where the plant grows around Lake Shasta. (Photo: California Department of Fish and Wildlife)

Lindstrand, who spent about 15 years studying wildlife and plants around Lake Shasta, said he came to different conclusions about how raising the height of the dam would affect the snow-wreath.

Raising the height of the dam would affect less than 3% of all known occurrences of the plant, Lindstrand said. His findings are included in an environmental impact report the bureau completed on the dam raise proposal.

The plant, a shrub that grows about 3 feet tall, was first discovered in 1992 growing along Cedar Creek east of Redding near Round Mountain. The plant can still be found in the Cow Creek watershed east of Redding, Lindstrand said.

There had been some question about how wildfire affects the snow-wreath, Lindstrand said.

But following the 2018 Hirz Fire, which burned about 46,000 acres at the north end of Lake Shasta, Lindstrand said he found patches of snow-wreath that grew back after the fire.

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He said the plant sprouted up again in areas where the fire burned through. Apparently, the plant spreads out roots underground and then sprouts up again after a burn, he said.

"Two populations completely burned. It's got a really extensive root system and it grew back like crazy," Lindstrand said.

The forest service already considers the snow-wreath a "sensitive species," Lindstrand said. Listing the snow-wreath as endangered could make it more difficult to do things to protect the plant, such as forest thinning projects, he said.

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