

Salt Creek tiger beetle goes on endangered list

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) -- The rarest insect in Nebraska is now on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species list.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle, found in the salt wetlands of eastern Nebraska, has been in decline since 1991, the service said Thursday in a news release from its office in Lakewood, Colo.

Recent surveys show that the Salt Creek tiger beetle population numbers about 150. The service said the remaining population is threatened by, among other things, habitat loss due to grazing, cultivation and development in Lancaster County; increased freshwater runoff and sediment from urban areas, which lowers the salt content in the water and encourages vegetative encroachment; pollution; and pesticide application and runoff.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle is considered a "bio-indicator" species, the service said. That means its presence signals the existence of a healthy saline wetland and serves as an important link in the food chain of the wetland ecosystem.

A healthy saline wetland provides benefits for people, such as water purification and flood control, the service said.

When a species is placed on the endangered list, the Fish and Wildlife Service works to conserve its habitat.

Projects and activities that occur on private lands where the beetle resides could be impacted if they require federal action such as permits or funds. The Fish and Wildlife Service would have to be consulted to evaluate the potential impact to the beetle and the need for possible alternatives to prevent any adverse impact.