

BLM Botanist Discovers a New Buckwheat

Dorothy Noble

A new species of native buckwheat (*Eriogonum*) was found near Guano Valley, Ore., by BLM botanist Virginia Crosby.

Buckwheat is a low-growing, flowering herb, common to the western states. It has more than 175 different known species, with 20 being found in the Lakeview BLM district.

Crosby spotted the plant while conducting a floristic study of the district.

"I saw it as I was driving along the road. It looked interesting and I tried to match it up in the keys, but it didn't fit any . . . I didn't know what it was," Crosby said.

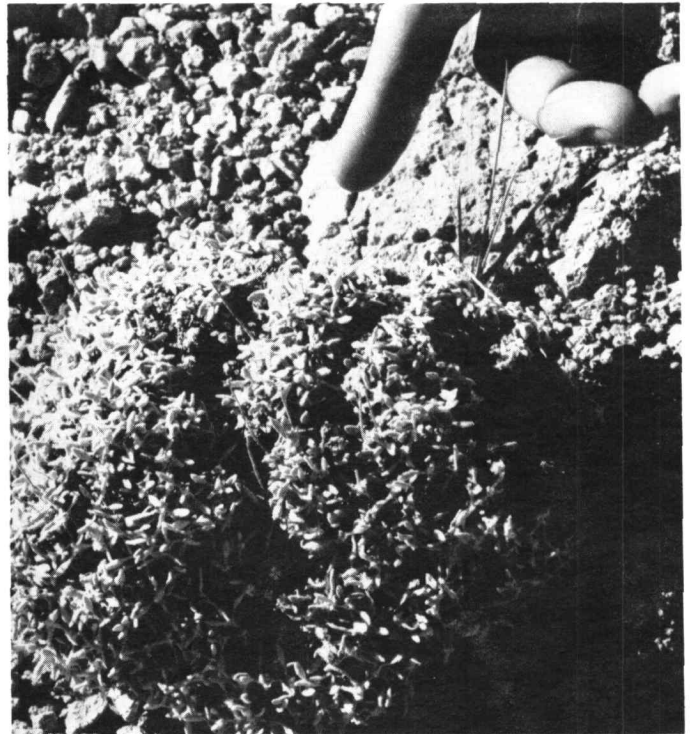


Here's where . . . BLM botanist Virginia Crosby points to the spot where she first located the new species of buckwheat, about 40 miles east of Lakeview, Oregon.

A specimen was sent to James Reveal, associate professor of botany at the University of Maryland, and a leading buckwheat authority. Reveal traveled to Lake County, in southern Oregon, the site of the discovery. After returning to Maryland, he verified it was a new species.

"That was great news! Afterall, it's not often a new species of plant is found," Crosby said.

The plant grows "quite abundantly, but only in a few spots," she said. "It occurs basically on tuffaceous (porous cinder) sandstone hillsides."



The plant grows on sandstone hillsides, is low-growing and flowers in the spring. Crosby said the plant likely has little forage value.

"Cattle have been known to eat the flowering tops, but I don't think this will be a good forage plant," she added.

Because the plant is in an isolated area, "there's no threat to the site. It will more than likely continue to be under the same kind of management," Crosby said.

Intensive plant inventories haven't been conducted in southeastern Oregon until recently. During the past two summers, Crosby has found 14 plant species on BLM lands that are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered. She's worked for BLM for about a year, during which she has established an herbarium of 750 dried and mounted local plant specimens used by BLM employees and the public for plant identification.