Overwhelming Scientific Validation Overrides False and Misleading Claims Regarding Tiehm's Buckwheat

The Center for Biological Diversity continues to make false and misleading assertions that last September's damage to Tiehm's buckwheat was human caused:

"This appears to have been a premeditated, somewhat organized, large-scale operation aimed at wiping out one of the rarest plants on Earth, one that was already in the pipeline for protection. It's despicable and heartless."

- Patrick Donnelly, in a press release from CBD on Sept. 16, 2020

Such statements, however, contradict the many statements supporting the conclusion that the plant species was in fact damaged by rodents:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

"Buckwheat DNA was detected in the scat, and the genetic signatures were a strong match (96.9-99.8 percent) to ground squirrels. This coupled with known white-tailed antelope ground squirrel populations at Rhyolite Ridge, burrowing at damaged plants, and rodent bite marks on plant roots strongly supports that ground squirrels were responsible for the damage. Current drought conditions likely motivated the rodents to seek moisture by consuming the shallow taproots of mature buckwheat plants."

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife, in the agency's conclusion on the Tiehm's Buckwheat destruction published Dec. 4, 2020.

Southern Utah University

"Rodents are a problem. I think the evidence for rodents being part of the Tiehm's Buckwheat destruction is really strong. It's circumstantial, but quite convincing… Overall, there seems to be a lack of systematic collection of evidence to support this human poaching hypothesis…"

- Dr. Jacqualine Grant, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Department of Biology Museum Director, in a Utah Native Plant Society presentation posted to YouTube on Mar. 23, 2021.

Data "…strongly support[s] the hypothesis that a diurnal rodent species in the genus 1 Ammospermophilus was responsible for damage to the Tiehm's buckwheat population at Rhyolite Ridge in the late summer or early fall of 2020."

- Dr. Jacqualine Grant, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Department of Biology Museum Director, in a report prepared for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and published Dec. 4, 2020.

University of Nevada Reno

"We did not notice any human or large animal tracks immediately surrounding the holes, and the disturbance looked very similar to what we had observed at the transplant sites I'd worked on earlier in the summer, which had primarily been caused by a couple species of small rodents, so we assumed they had been created by some small mammal."

- Jamey McClinton, in a report detailing University of Nevada Reno's discovery of the damage to Tiehm's Buckwheat on Sept. 8, 2020.

"To reiterate, I was not on-site, but based on photos, descriptions, and our conversations, I fully agree… When I look at these photos, I see evidence of industrious small animals, not humans."

- Dr. Elizabeth Leger, Professor of Ecology and Director of UNR's Museum of Natural History, in a statement to media.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife

"Two small mammal species observed on site or by sign were identified as possibly responsible for the vegetation damage: pocket gopher (Thomomys spp) and white-tailed antelope ground squirrel (Ammospermophilus leucurus). Observations of the extent and type of damage is consistent with pocket gopher activity… "…any human contribution to the kinds of damage observed must have been minor at most, and would not be the best explanation for the totality of evidence observed."

- The Nevada Department of Wildlife, in the initial site assessment from biologists published Sept. 23, 2020.

The Bureau of Land Management

"Current drought conditions likely motivated the rodents to seek moisture by consuming the shallow taproots of mature buckwheat plants. This is the first time herbivory was documented on Tiehm's buckwheat and its significance depends not only on its frequency and intensity, but whether damaged plants can recover and survive."

- Chris Rose, spokesperson for the Bureau for Land Management, in an email to the Nevada Current.

Nevada Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

"While the investigation is still underway and the cause has yet to be determined, the evidence reported to us is consistent with herbivore activity."

The Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural resources also detailed that the evidence includes variations in the degrees of damage, from plants completely uprooted and intact, plants uprooted and further shredded and scattered, plants partially excavated from above with roots in place but partially gnawed, plants apparently uprooted from beneath, plants shredded but not excavated and intact plants where adjacent digging had begun but stopped before reaching roots. Where roots had been severed, the breaks were ragged, not straight and "clean," and the bark was missing near the ends. There were no reports of tool marks. Human and other large footprints were not in the immediate vicinity of most of the disturbed plants, and any footprints observed were consistent with recent past survey visits to the sites.

- Samantha Thompson, Spokeswoman for the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, in an email to The Associated Press for a Sept. 21, 2020 article.