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For Immediate Release

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CONSERVATION GROUPS SEEK PROTECTION FOR RARE UTAH WILDFLOWER UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Salt Lake City – Yesterday, May 19th, three local and regional conservation and botanical organizations filed a petition asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately list Mussentuchit Gilia (pronounced Musn't-touch-it and named after the Mussentuchit desert north of Capitol Reef National Park), a strikingly beautiful wildflower found only in Utah, as an threatened or endangered species. This status would give it protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Mussentuchit Gilia (*Gilia tenuis*) is known to exist in only 17 locations (less than 2500 plants) along the western slope of the San Rafael Swell. The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Utah Native Plant Society, and Center for Native Ecosystems filed the petition to protect the species from escalating threats.

The primary, immediate threat to the future survival of the wildflower is the dramatic increase in oil and gas exploration and drilling which destroys plants and degrades their habitat. In addition to oil and gas development, Mussentuchit Gilia is also threatened by off-road vehicle damage and overgrazing.

“That the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Fish and Wildlife Service have failed to protect this imperiled species in the face of mounting oil and gas threats shows how little these agencies care about saving Utah’s natural heritage,” said SUWA attorney Steve Bloch.

Bill King of the Utah Native Plant Society agreed, stating that “the rising level of threats to Mussentuchit Gilia, including an explosion in off-road vehicle use and damage in the San Rafael Swell, makes the protection of this species an absolute priority.” “We must hold the BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service to a higher standard; one that puts a premium on protecting Utah’s irreplaceable natural heritage,” continued King.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service and federal land management agencies are so busy expediting permits for oil, gas, and mining activities that they are ignoring their obligation to protect native wildflowers like the Mussentuchit Gilia, said Erin Robertson, staff biologist for the Center for Native Ecosystems.

Mussentuchit Gilia is a member of the phlox family and produces between 2-5 striking pale blue tube shaped flowers. A complete copy of the listing petition can be found at the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance’s website – www.suwa.org, as well as the Center for Native Ecosystem’s website - www.nativeecosystems.org.