

Poweshiek Skipperling

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What is the Poweshiek Skipperling?

The Poweshiek Skipperling is a small moth-like butterfly with about a one inch wingspan. The larvae (caterpillars) are green with white stripes and a pale green head.

The butterfly's name could come from a former chief of the Meskwaki (Fox) tribe of Native Americans in present day Iowa.

What is their "status"?

The Poweshiek Skipperling is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Candidate species are those for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has sufficient information to list as threatened or endangered.

Candidate species receive no legal protection under the Endangered Species Act- that is; there are no legal prohibitions under the federal Endangered Species Act against taking candidate species.

The NRCS works with USDA program participants to implement conservation actions for candidate species that may eliminate the need to list the species as threatened or endangered.

Where in S.D. do they call home?

This species may occur only in high-quality prairie of several northeastern South Dakota counties: Brookings, Clark, Codington, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Marshall, and Roberts. The butterfly is present on the prairie year round.

Where am I most likely to see this butterfly?

The Poweshiek Skipperling occurs in two types of habitat. The first is upland (dry) bluestem prairie (mainly little bluestem and dropseed species) in which the following wildflowers are usually present and in flower when Poweshiek Skipperlings are in their adult (flight) stage. These wildflowers are: purple coneflower, black-eyed Susan, prairie coneflower, ox-eye daisy, coreopsis, and white prairie clover.



Photo by Dennis R. Skadsen

The second and probably **most important habitat type** is wet or riparian areas with sedges. The larvae use sedges as a host plant. The males patrol above sedges in search of females.

Look for this butterfly flying around in late-June to late-July.

What are the threats?

- Populations are isolated from one another in relatively small areas of remnant native prairie.
- Grazing that decreases plant health and increases non-native species.
- Habitat conversion to cultivated agriculture.
- Inappropriate fire management and herbicide use.
- Woody plant invasion and invasive plant species.
- Road construction, and gravel mining.

What are the opportunities? Poweshiek Skipperlings and their prairie habitat are dependent on some type of periodical disturbance; otherwise it would become shrubby or forested. The SD NRCS provides technical and/or financial assistance to landowners to address threats to this species that may occur on their land.

Stop in and ask the local NRCS office to assist you with preparing land management plans which will achieve your objectives and help this butterfly.

Three specific actions landowners can take are:

Prescribed Burning:

Fire is a natural component of prairie habitats, but Poweshiek Skipperlings are vulnerable to fire at virtually all life stages and depend on repopulation from unburned areas to persist. ***This butterfly is more vulnerable to fire than the Dakota skipper*** because their larvae do not burrow into the ground very deep.

Ensure that only a small proportion of their habitat is burned in any given year and only burn as frequently as is necessary to achieve specific objectives.

The NRCS can help you develop a prescribed burn plan in conjunction with a prescribed grazing system that will maintain and/or increase plant health or forage production, and prevent succession from grassland to shrubs or trees.

Maintain and Improve Healthy Grazing Lands:

Grazing maintains grassland habitats. However, preferred plants may disappear if grazing does not occur in a manner that sustains the native prairie plants.

Ensure that a sustainable grazing system is developed and implemented that addresses both livestock and butterfly needs.

The NRCS can help develop a grazing system that maintains and/or increases plant health and forage production while providing butterfly habitat.

Native Prairie Restoration:

Restoring prairie grassland habitats may help this species. Converting cropland to native prairie grasses and forbs (wildflowers) preferred by the

Poweshiek skipperling provides habitat when the restoration occurs in a location and size suitable to the butterfly's needs.

Ensure that native prairie restoration is developed and implemented that addresses both livestock and the butterfly's needs.

The NRCS can help develop a prairie restoration plan that provides livestock forage and butterfly habitat.

To learn more contact your local NRCS office, or go to www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov.