

Solanum nelsoni, which may be suitable larval stage host plants.

Our Response: We were provided with additional information in the form of recently completed surveys for portions of the proposed Unit 3. The study, conducted by the Hawaii Biological Survey and the Bishop Museum, showed that areas on the western edge of the proposed Unit 3, encompassing and bordering some Kahului Airport lands, were in fact relatively devoid of identified primary constituent elements, and the area would therefore not appear to provide suitable long-term habitat for the moth. As a result of receiving the additional information on the proposed Unit 3, critical habitat in the area is now designated in the form of two smaller units that do not encompass the Kahului Airport runway safety zone, nor any other Kahului Airport lands other than that contained within the Kanaha Pond Wildlife Sanctuary boundaries. See the Summary of Changes from the Proposed Rule section for additional detail on the changes that were made to this unit.

We agree that *Solanum nelsoni* could potentially serve as an alternate coastal host plant food source for the moth's larval stage. We will include a research objective to explore the suitability of *Solanum nelsoni* as larval stage host plant in the draft recovery plan for this species, currently under preparation.

(19) **Comment:** One commenter pointed out that approximately 4 ha (10 ac) of proposed Unit 3 overlapped with a private parcel under a grazing lease. It was requested that the area in question be removed from the designation if the primary constituent elements were not present, or if the area did not warrant special management considerations.

Our Response: As a result of receiving additional information on proposed Unit 3, we excluded several portions of this proposed unit, including the area in question from critical habitat because we determined that those areas lacked the moth's primary constituent elements. See the Summary of Changes from the Proposed Rule section for additional detail on the changes we made to this unit.

(20) **Comment:** One peer reviewer with HDOA suggested that the lack of collection records for certain potential parasites and predators on Molokai does not mean those organisms are not present on the island. Rather it is possible that the lack of records is, in fact, an artifact of limited prior collecting work there. It was recommended that searches for these potential parasites and predators should be conducted on Molokai before special effort is put forth to utilize the island as

a restoration site for the Blackburn's sphinx moth.

Our Response: We agree. The need to better document the presence of potential predator and parasites within identified habitat conservation areas for the Blackburn's sphinx moth will be addressed in the draft recovery plan currently being prepared for the species.

(21) **Comment:** One peer reviewer with DOFAW suggested that the proposed Units 1, 2, 6, and 7 would require fencing and large scale feral ungulate management to ensure conservation of the moth and its host plants in those areas. On a related note, one reviewer and one commenter suggested that the use of managed grazing could potentially aid moth habitat restoration through the suppression of invasive weeds and fire fuels.

Our Response: We agree with the reviewer regarding the identified fencing needs, yet we also acknowledge that managed grazing, and even highly managed game animal populations, may potentially serve as tools in the suppression of invasive weeds and fire fuels. Many of these concepts are explored in greater detail within the draft recovery plan currently being prepared for the moth. Furthermore, we look forward to developing and implementing innovative strategies to restore identified Blackburn's sphinx moth habitat conservation areas with our public and private partners involved in the management of game or livestock.

(22) **Comment:** One peer reviewer with DOFAW stated that a potential, but resolvable, conflict in land management could occur within proposed Unit 3, specifically within the boundaries of the Kanaha Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, based on current management plans to ultimately restore the 95 ha (235 ac) of sanctuary lands as much as possible to native pre-contact conditions. The planned removal of all alien plant species may entail the removal of all existing *Nicotiana glauca* plants, the nonnative host plant for the moth. It was suggested that planned experimental outplanting of native *Nothocestrum* spp. may be attempted within the sanctuary. However, it was noted that if the attempts were unsuccessful, there may then be a need to retain the *N. glauca* for the moth, an important change in both the sanctuary's management and management plans.

Our Response: We agree that the restoration of the Kanaha Pond area to a more native and pre-contact condition will benefit the remaining native components of that ecosystem, and that it should benefit the Blackburn's sphinx

moth as well. We look forward to developing and implementing an innovative restoration strategy for this area with DOFAW. Determining if there are suitable, native coastal host plants that could be outflanked for the moth's larval stage is a research need that we will address in the draft recovery plan.

(23) **Comment:** One commenter provided additional information about the extent of grazing activities within proposed Unit 7 on Molokai, and questioned whether the area actually contained the Blackburn's sphinx moth's primary constituent elements. It was requested that the area be excluded from the designation.

Our Response: As a result of receiving the additional information on proposed Unit 7, several portions of the proposed unit were excluded from critical habitat because new information revealed some lands in that unit did not contain the primary constituent elements, or were more seriously degraded than previously ascertained, and are therefore not essential for the conservation of the species. See the Summary of Changes from the Proposed Rule section for additional detail on the changes that were made to this unit.

(24a) **Comment:** It was recommended by two commenters that some of the areas within proposed Unit 1 be excluded since they did not contain the moth's primary constituent elements. One peer reviewer suggested that proposed Unit 1 could be extended eastward of the southern Haleakala boundary to Kaupo, especially along the coast (e.g., Nui coastline), to include additional areas containing the primary constituent elements. (24b) **Comment:** Another peer reviewer with DOFAW recommended that the boundaries of proposed Unit 3 be expanded by extending the unit to the south and southeast to include the area demarcated by Highway 36, and east along Highway 36 to the three-way intersection of Highway 37 with Old Haleakala Highway and Hana Highway. The reviewer noted that both Blackburn's sphinx moth adults and larvae had been observed on numerous occasions, often in good numbers within the area. Furthermore, the reviewer suggested that this expansion of proposed Unit 3 would provide additional windward and mesic habitat for the moth, a habitat type not highly represented in the proposed areas.

Our Response: As a result of receiving the additional information on proposed Unit 1, critical habitat in the area is now designated in the form of four smaller units. See the Summary of Changes from the Proposed Rule section for additional detail on the changes that were made to