Program Summary

The Nez Perce Tribe currently owns and/or manages 139,500 acres of fee title and trust property within and adjacent to their reservation in north-central Idaho. Due to limited financial resources, inaccessibility, and steep terrain, few native plant communities have been fully assessed for the presence of rare or culturally valuable plant species. This paucity of information makes it difficult for tribal managers to make informed decisions regarding land uses and potential impacts to significant botanical resources, including threatened or endangered plant species.

The goal of this proposal is to conduct surveys for three rare plant species (Jessica's Aster, Spalding's Catchfly, and Palouse Goldenweed) inhabiting grassland and dry forest habitats on lands owned and managed by the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. All three species are imperiled because of rarity or because of other factors demonstrably making them vulnerable to extinction. Identification of additional populations would allow tribal biologists to evaluate threats, mitigate impacts from land uses, and monitor the populations for long-term viability. Such activities would help perpetuate the species' and hopefully assist with species recovery so that future listings by the USFWS are not necessary; a key component of the USFWS Strategic Plan. The Spalding's Catchfly conservation strategy (Hill and Gray 2004) specifically calls for additional habitat-specific surveys as a necessary part of species conservation. The current proposal has received support from the Boise office of the USFWS and the regional Tri-State Weed Management Area group as evidenced by the letters in Appendix A.

Information gathered through this project will be used to develop a conservation strategy for rare and culturally significant plant populations occurring on tribal lands. This strategy will then be incorporated into the Integrated Resource Management Planning (IRMP) process that is currently underway. The IRMP process was developed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to assist Tribes in developing strategic level plans of how to manage natural resources on their reservations. The resultant plan provides a framework for integrating sustainable use of natural resources with an individual tribe's social and cultural values.

Program Narrative

The Nez Perce Tribe currently owns and/or manages 139,500 acres of fee title and trust property within and adjacent to their reservation in north-central Idaho (Figure 1). Much of this land is used to generate economic income for the tribe through timber harvest, livestock grazing, and dryland agriculture, although approximately 20,000 acres is managed solely to benefit fish, wildlife, and native plant populations.

Native plant communities on the Nez Perce Reservation include dry eastside forests of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), shrub fields, canyon grasslands dominated by perennial bunchgrasses (primarily *Festuca ovina* var. *ingrata* and *Pseudoregneria spicatum*), wet meadows, hardwood riparian areas, and remnants of the Palouse Prairie. Due to limited financial resources, inaccessibility, and steep terrain, few of these native plant communities have been fully assessed for the presence of rare or culturally significant plant species. This paucity of information makes it difficult for tribal managers to make informed decisions regarding land uses and potential impacts to rare species or communities containing cultural plants. Targeted plant surveys of unique communities would provide the necessary information to establish a framework for the conservation of biological diversity on tribal lands.