

Protocol for Tours Featuring the Karner Blue Butterfly

The Karner blue butterfly is a Federally endangered species, and the actions of people walking through occupied habitat have the potential to take individuals of this species in any of its life stages. Yet, the greatest hope for recovery of this species comes through management of habitats where this butterfly lives. An informed and supportive public is pivotal to successful implementation of this needed management. Many people relate best to subjects of interest when they can personally see or experience them. Tours are an effective means to help interested individuals to better understand the butterfly.

Moreover, there is increasing interest in butterflies in general. This interest typically extends to questions about butterfly life history, food preference, and habitat requirements. Such interest is often met through discussion of these questions using a single butterfly species as an example. In the case of the Karner blue butterfly, answers to all of these questions are known. Thus, the Karner blue serves as an excellent subject species to focus discussion on butterflies in general. Tours often compliment that discussion.

The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidelines for conducting tours in occupied habitat in ways that do not harm or take the Karner blue butterfly.

- Tours need to be lead by individuals trained in identification of the butterfly, its behavior, and habitat including host food plant (lupine) and nectar source plants. The leader must also be competent in carrying out the tour plan.
- The number of attendees served on a tour needs to be restricted to the number that the tour leader can directly oversee at all times.
- A tour plan needs to be developed that includes how the tour will be conducted, what latitude of attendee activities and movement will be permitted, and what attendee expectations will be met. This will prompt the need for advance information on the tour site including the presence of butterflies, presence of host and nectar plants, and presence and location of trails.
- An introductory briefing for tour attendees is needed to tell them how the tour will be conducted, what restrictions will be placed upon them, and what opportunities they will be experiencing. Attendees will be cautioned not to attempt to capture butterflies nor approach butterflies except as directed by the tour leader.
- Attendees need to be maintained in spots removed from suitable habitat whenever possible (on trails, in opening portions devoid of lupine).
- Do not encourage contact with the butterfly by untrained, unescorted individuals.
- Do not provide butterfly location information except as guided by State and Federal authorities.
- One-on-one oversight is needed for attendees taking pictures or filming where the photo subject is an individual butterfly or plant. Where suitable, provide reference resources (photos, film clips, websites) to meet attendee expectations in lieu of potentially harmful contact with the butterfly or its habitat.