

Agency says black abalone may need protection

By: North County Times -

A wildlife agency has tentatively determined that the black abalone, a marine mollusk that once was plentiful from Northern California to Baja California, may require federal protection to avoid disappearing from local coastal waters.

The National Marine Fisheries Service announced Friday that listing the black abalone as a threatened or endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act may be warranted. The finding follows the filing of a petition by an environmental group, the Center for Biological Diversity, in December 2006 requesting special protection for the sea animal.

Agency officials said the species was harvested intensely during the 1800s, then the practice was banned early last century. However, harvesting resumed again in 1968. And a disease wiped out 90 percent of the population in the vicinity of Southern California's Channel Islands.

The agency is seeking public comment about the potential listing over the next 60 days. A decision is anticipated by late December.

Information is available at www.nmfs.noaa.gov.