



WEDNESDAY
August 24, 2005

Conservation groups sue for salamander protection

By JEFF BARNARD
Associated Press Writer

GRANTS PASS, Ore. -- Conservation groups sued the government Tuesday for failing to respond to their petitions to protect two species of salamander from southwestern Oregon and Northern California under the Endangered Species Act.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Portland claims the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service violated the Endangered Species Act by missing 90-day and 12-month deadlines to respond to petitions to list the Siskiyou Mountains and Scott Bar salamanders as threatened or endangered species.

It seeks a court order for Fish and Wildlife to make a preliminary finding within 30 days.

The Scott Bar salamander was recognized as a new species last May.

Noah Greenwald, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, said the Bush administration has not listed any species as threatened or endangered except when ordered to by a federal judge.

He said the Siskiyou Mountain salamander was one of the hundreds of rare species protected from habitat loss from logging under the Northwest Forest Plan until the Bush administration replaced the regulation with a less restrictive test.

A federal judge recently ruled the change was made illegally, without regard to the

effect on plants and animals.

"One of the reasons why (the salamander) needs Endangered Species Act protection is that the Bush administration is weakening other forest protections," Greenwald said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not immediately respond to a telephone call for comment on the lawsuit.

Both salamanders are about five inches long, colored black with speckles, and have no lungs, breathing through their skin. That makes them particularly vulnerable to higher temperatures and lower humidity when logging eliminates the cooling shade of a forest canopy along the north-facing rocky slopes where they live.

They play an important role in the ecology of forests, serving as a link in the food chain by eating small insects and other organisms, and in turn being eaten by owls and other predators, the lawsuit said.

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is found in the Applegate River drainage in Oregon and the Klamath River drainage in California. The Scott Bar salamander is found along the Klamath River near Scott Bar.