

**ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS ASK FOR PROTECTION OF LONGFIN SMELT**

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Three environmental organizations announced today that they are seeking state and federal endangered species protection for the longfin smelt - a small silver fish that was once among the most abundant populations in the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary.

The Bay Institute, Center for Biological Diversity and Natural Resources Defense Council simultaneously asked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the Bay-Delta population under the federal Endangered Species Act and the California Fish and Game Commission to list the species under the California Endangered Species Act.

Recognition under these acts would limit the harm that federal and state governments directly or indirectly do to the fish, according to Tina Swanson of the Bay Institute.

"Any time federal or state government takes activities that may harm the species, they will have to review the activities and measure impacts," Swanson said.

Although the Bay-Delta estuary still hosts the largest self-sustaining population of longfin smelt in southern states, the area has experienced a 97 percent population decrease in the last 20 years and a consistent drop over the last four years.

The population has declined as a result of water diversions and reduced freshwater inflow, direct and indirect impacts of nonnative species on the food supply and habitat, and both lethal and sub-lethal effects of pesticides and toxic chemicals, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

The organization argues that substandard environmental management is resulting in the population decline, and that some of the same environmental conditions also caused a collapse of the delta smelt population.

"Poor management of California's largest estuary ecosystem could claim another of our native fish species, this time the longfin smelt, a species formerly so common that it supported a commercial fishery in San Francisco Bay," said Jeff Miller, a conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Miller said that both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state's Fish and Game Commission have 90 days to respond to the emergency petitions.

Miller admits that the likelihood of immediate protection for the longfin smelt is not certain. "We petitioned for uplifting the delta smelt and filed an emergency petition and the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service has still failed to respond to the petition," Miller said. "I would say that based on the response to the delta smelt, it seems unlikely."