

Groups seek protection for tree voles

PORTLAND - Conservation groups Monday petitioned to list the dusky tree vole, a tiny mouselike animal that spends its life in the tops of large trees on Northwestern Oregon, as a threatened or endangered species because of the loss of old growth forests to logging and wildfire.

“Decades of excessive logging, uncontrolled growth, fire, road construction and extensive pollution have placed the survival of the dusky tree vole and literally hundreds of other Tillamook wildlife species at risk,” Noah Greenwald of the Center for Biological Diversity said in a statement. “Without better protection for the forests, streams and coasts of the Tillamook rain forest and north coast, the dusky tree vole and dozens of other species will

need the strong protections of the Endangered species Act.”

The petition was filed with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. It said recent surveys failed to find voles where they were common between 1950 and 1975.

Forests in the Tillamook region are managed primarily by the Oregon Department of Forestry, either as private timberlands or as state forests made up of lands forfeited for taxes. The department has no specific regulations to protect the voles.

Department spokesman Rod Nichols said officials are looking at the petition.

Much of Northwestern Oregon burned in a series of large fires in

the 1930s and were reforested in the 1950s, growing up as tree plantations dominated by Douglas fir.

The Oregon Department of Forestry adopted a plan in 2002 to thin the forests to produce a variety of habitats for fish and wildlife, while also producing timber. Counties and legislators in the area recently asked the state Board of Forestry to increase harvest levels.