

# Tucson Citizen

Tucson shovel-nosed snake

## Rare snake may cause battle over development

Reptile may tip scales against development

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A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service decision Tuesday could spark a pygmy owl-like battle over hundreds of thousands of acres of highly developable desert stretching from Tucson to north of Phoenix.

The service will review the Tucson shovel-nosed snake and eventually decide whether to grant the foot-long snake Endangered Species Act protection. The snake is a rare denizen of sandy valley floors whose habitat is about 1.3 million acres stretching in a wedge northwest from Tucson.

That protection could threaten development of huge stretches of land along both sides of Interstate 10 in much the same way the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl threatened to do in the 1990s, said Phil Rosen, a University of Arizona herpetologist.

"Legally, it's right in the path of where every environmentally unfriendly developer would hope to build seas of tile roofs," Rosen said.

The 7-inch-tall owl was big news in the late 1990s, when the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned to have it put on the endangered species list.

The bird was listed as endangered in 1997. It was removed from the list in 2006. In 1997, the center sued Amphitheater Public Schools to block a high school planned in the owl's habitat. The school, Ironwood Ridge, was eventually built.

Putting the snake on the endangered species list would block development outright or make it prohibitively expensive, said Ed Taczanowsky, president of the Southern Arizona Home Builders Association, a trade group that represents builders.

"This would be another pygmy owl-like case," Taczanowsky said.

In 2004, the center petitioned Fish & Wildlife to deem the snake threatened or endangered. The service was supposed to have issued a decision within 90 days of the filing. The center eventually sued to force Tuesday's action.

Tuesday's decision is the beginning of the listing process, said Marit Alanen, a service wildlife biologist.

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