

ENDANGERED SPECIES: Groups petition FWS to list Amargosa toad (02/28/2008)

April Reese, *Land Letter* Western reporter

The Amargosa toad should be added to the federal endangered species list, according to a petition filed Tuesday with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by environmental groups.

In their petition, filed Feb. 26, the Center for Biological Diversity and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility argue that urban development, water diversions and increased off-road vehicle use throughout the toad's range in Nevada's Oasis Valley have pushed the species toward extinction.

According to the groups, the Amargosa toad is already restricted to a 10-mile stretch of the Amargosa River -- one of Nevada's last free-flowing rivers -- and adjacent desert uplands.

"It only has a small amount of habitat," said Daniel Patterson, PEER's southwest director, who formerly worked for the Bureau of Land Management in Nevada as an ecologist. "It's got no where to go. There's really no room for error."

FWS considered listing the toad in the 1990s after receiving a petition from environmental groups but decided the species did not warrant federal protection. At the time, FWS concluded that the toad was more widespread than the petition suggested, although it also said more surveys were needed.

Males tend to be smaller, reaching 3 to 4 inches, while females may reach 3.5 to 5 inches. Unlike most frogs and toads, the Amargosa toad is voiceless except for "release calls" or chirps made by males when grasped below their forelimbs by another toad or human. Photo courtesy of FWS.

"The Amargosa toad is imminently in danger of extinction throughout all of its range," the recent petition says. "The combination of few breeding populations, small range, and little remaining habitat within the range makes the species highly susceptible to extinction due to urban development and random events such as drought, disease or other occurrences."

The main threat to the species is loss of habitat from development, the petition says. The town of Beatty, Nev., lies at the southern end of the toad's range.

Of special concern is a BLM proposal to "privatize" important toad habitat for development on the Amargosa River near Beatty, said Daniel Patterson, PEER's southwest director.

But BLM's resource management plan for the area calls for keeping about 400 acres of the toad's habitat within federal hands, according to Elroy Masters, BLM-Nevada's wildlife program lead. JoLynn Worley, a spokeswoman in BLM's state office, said the bureau only has one land sale pending near Beatty, involving less than half an acre adjacent to a hotel. The hotel accidentally paved public land, and BLM decided to sell the land to the hotel, but the area is not part of the toad's habitat, she said. BLM sold a 40-acre parcel near Beatty in recent years, but those lands also were not within the toad's habitat, Masters added.

In 2000, FWS and BLM, along with state and local government entities, crafted a conservation agreement to protect the toad and other species that coexist in the Oasis Valley. Pointing to a

2006 survey that found 5,000 toads, Masters said the voluntary conservation agreement is working.

"I believe they've been pretty stable," Masters said.

Rob Mrowka, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, disagrees. "The agreement is woefully insufficient," he said. "The protections of the Endangered Species Act are sorely needed."

[Click here](#) to read the groups' petition.

April Reese writes from Santa Fe, N.M.