



Judge says agencies violated federal act

Forest plans didn't consider endangered species, ruling adds

By Zeke Barlow
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A coalition of environmental organizations won a lawsuit on Monday after a judge ruled that federal agencies violated the Endangered Species Act when they reviewed plans on how to manage Los Padres National Forest and three other Southern California forests.

The judge ruled that both the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not do an adequate biological opinion that quantifies how decisions in the forests affect threatened and endangered species.

"Today's ruling recognizes the important role that our national forests play in the survival and recovery of endangered plants and animals, giving them the attention they so desperately deserve," said Jeff Kuyper, executive director of Los Padres ForestWatch, which brought the suit along with the Center for Biological Diversity, the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife.

Although spokespersons for the National Marine Fisheries and the Fish and Wildlife services said they couldn't comment because the agencies are still interpreting the finding, Los Padres spokesman Andrew Madsen said the forest plan does protect species.

"We are confident that our forest management plan is functionally sound, comprehensive and provides the basis for long-term sustainable management," he said.

"In the long run, this will make our plan stronger."

In 2005, the Forest Service unveiled its management plan, which outlined how the agency will oversee activities ranging from oil drilling to road building in the coming decades.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are responsible for examining how those activities may affect specific numbers of endangered species.

But Judge Marilyn Patel of the U.S. District Court of Northern California ruled that the agencies didn't quantify how much species, such as steelhead trout, could be affected under the forest management plan.

She said both sides must come up with a new plan on how to address the issue in the next 21 days.

Of the four national forests in Southern California, Los Padres National Forest is home to the most endangered or threatened species.



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