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## Environmental protectors open Vermont office

### Center for Biological Diversity Arrives

By Candace Page  
*Free Press Staff Writer*

When the Bush administration put the polar bear on the list of threatened species last month, the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity chalked up another victory.

Since its founding 19 years ago, the center has petitioned and sued - - successfully -- to add 350 species to the threatened and endangered list, from polar bears to spiders, toads and birds. The group also files lawsuits to force the government to protect habitat for rare species in decline on federal land.

Now the Center for Biological Diversity has opened an office in Richmond, its first office in the Northeast, and serves notice of the group's interest in species protection in the Eastern United States.

Thursday, the center celebrated its arrival in Vermont with a reception in Burlington.

"This is a very serious commitment we are making, a commitment we are very excited about and intend to deliver on," Peter Galvin, conservation director and a founder of the Center for Biological Diversity, told an audience of about 50 supporters at the ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center.

"It's going to be complex for us. The lay of the land is different, the issues are different," he said, adding that one focus for the new office will be fighting to protect Northeastern forests recovering from clear-cutting in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Vermont Law School professor Patrick Parenteau, an expert on the Endangered Species Act, has worked on cases with the center and said the group "has become a force to be reckoned with" on species protection.

"Litigation is their primary tool and they are very good at it," he said in an e-mail interview before the celebration. "They take a 'save all the pieces' approach to ecosystem protection and put legal muscle behind the principles of conservation biology."

That does not win the Center for Biological Diversity friends in every quarter.

"They are a take-no-prisoners kind of outfit that rubs a lot of people the wrong way, including their colleagues," Parenteau said. "Compromise is not in their vocabulary -- they think there's been enough compromising of habitat and ecological integrity."

#### **Saving a spotted owl**

Galvin was a 20-some-thing conservation biologist surveying owls for the U.S. Forest Service in New Mexico when he and two colleagues found a rare Mexican spotted owl nest in old-growth forest scheduled to be sold and cut down - - in violation of the Forest Service's own rules, Galvin says.

The three young men took the story to the local newspaper, prompting a campaign to stop the timber sale and germinating the organization that would become the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The outgrowth was a timber harvest reduction of 75 percent to 80 percent below what it had been. That campaign led to some major changes in the management of national forests in the Southwest," Galvin recalled in a telephone interview this week.

"Our primary focus is endangered species and wildlands -- the habitats they depend on," he said. The center's tools are science, the law and activism.

Over 19 years, the center has grown to a staff of 63 scientists and lawyers and has expanded its reach to species throughout the West.

Working with other national and local environmental advocates, the center has filed more than 400 lawsuits and won 87 percent of them in out-of-court settlements and judges' decisions, Galvin said.

Among the victories: Removal of cattle from 500 miles of streambank on U.S. Forest Service land in the Southwest; comprehensive reform of land management in Southern California's national forests to protect creatures, including bighorn sheep and the California condor; and winning a court order that forced the Bush administration to issue a report on the effects of global climate change on the United States.

The center's most widely known victory is its most recent one: addition of the polar bear to the list of threatened species because global climate change is melting its sea-ice habitat.

### **Lynx, wolf, salmon**

The Center for Biological Diversity arrived in Vermont by absorbing a small local group, Forest Watch, and hiring its deputy director, Mollie Matteson.

Galvin said his organization has wanted to tackle species protection issues in the East for a number of

years, and a large, timely anonymous donation made that possible.

"The Northeast is different from the Southwest, and we are aware of that," he said. Unlike the West, most of the Eastern landscape is not controlled by the federal government.

"But you've got issues like massive development in the Maine north woods, development that could create huge problems for the recovery of species like the lynx and, potentially, the wolf," he said.

"And the ocean is the largest federally owned landscape, the largest wilderness there is," he said. "We plan to ramp up our activities there."

Already the center has joined advocates in Maine to sue the federal government to add the Kennebec River population of Atlantic salmon to the endangered species list.

"We already have more issues than Mollie can possibly handle," he said, and the center hopes to add staff over time.

"We are excited to be part of the biodiversity protection movement in a part of the country that is new to us," he said.

## **Advocates at work**

Since opening a Northeast office in Richmond on Jan. 1, the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity has taken the following actions, often working with other environmental advocacy groups:

SUED the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to protect the dwindling Kennebec River population of Atlantic salmon under the Endangered Species Act.

FILED NOTICE OF INTENT TO SUE the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to force a review of permits for federal projects like road-building that could harm bat populations. Eastern bats are threatened by "white-nose syndrome," a mysterious ailment that has decimated hibernating bats in New York, Vermont and elsewhere.

PROTESTED plans to create a new snowmobile corridor in the "Natural Turnpike" area of the Green Mountain National Forest in Ripton and Lincoln. The Forest Service dropped those plans.

FILED COMMENTS urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to limit snowmobile access, among other actions, to better protect wildlife at the Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge in the Northeast Kingdom.