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Environmentalists lawsuit seeks to bolster desert tortoise

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Environmentalists are suing the Bureau of Land Management alleging millions of acres authorized for off-road vehicles in the Mojave Desert and Sonoran Desert in California are jeopardizing the survival of the endangered desert tortoise.

Monday's complaint in federal court by the Center for Biological Diversity and other groups said the desert tortoise's survival is at risk because the government allows off-road vehicles in about 7.1 million acres.

Off-road vehicles, the groups charged, "drive through critical tortoise habitats, resulting in direct tortoise deaths and serious damage to habitat that is critical to their survival."

The roads stretch through Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Kern and Inyo counties.

Environmentalists and off-road enthusiasts have long butted heads over desert land being available to recreational vehicles. Off-road enthusiasts complain open lands are too often off-limits to them, and environmentalists argue that land is open to off-road vehicles at the expense of protecting habitat.

The case is Center for Biological Diversity v. Bureau of Land Management, 06-4884.

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