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Groups plan suit for protection of another forest species

By MICHAEL MILSTEIN

Several Oregon environmental groups filed notice Thursday that they intend to sue the federal government to list the dusky tree vole, native to forests in the Tillamook region, as a threatened or endangered species.

Joan Jewett, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the agency is still reviewing the original petition from the groups and will probably announce its finding in the next few weeks.

The groups including the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands Project, Oregon Wild and Audubon Society of Portland said they would sue Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne for failing to respond to their earlier petition for listing of the animal. The groups said the dusky tree vole is a subspecies of red tree vole found in the Tillamook region.

However, state forest officials who manage much of the Tillamook region said their understanding from federal officials is that the dusky tree vole is not a recognized subspecies of the red tree vole. The Oregon Department of Forestry views the voles as a sensitive species and is considering some research on the animals in the area, spokesman Rod Nichols said.

The groups said that recent surveys have failed to locate the voles where they were once common. They blamed the decline on the impacts of logging.