



THURSDAY  
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## Environmentalists sue feds over Mexican garter snake

AP Alert - New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE The Center for Biological Diversity has accused the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of failing to respond to a petition seeking the protection of the Mexican garter snake as an endangered species.

The center filed a lawsuit this week in an attempt to get the federal agency to act on the petition it filed more than a year ago.

"Widespread degradation of Southwest rivers and introduction of dozens of exotic species necessitates protection of the Mexican garter snake under the (Endangered Species Act)," said Noah Greenwald, a biologist with the environmental group.

The Mexican garter snake has vanished from most of its native range across Arizona, southwestern New Mexico and Mexico \_ including the San Pedro, Gila, Colorado and Santa Cruz rivers, according to Greenwald.

The snake, which varies in color from olive or olive-brown to olive-gray, with three yellow stripes running the length of its body, eats mostly native fish and frogs but also may eat mice and lizards.

Greenwald said the snake's decline is tied to the disappearance of native fish and frogs and declining quality of stream habitats.

Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Elizabeth Slown said Wednesday the agency hadn't seen the lawsuit but that federal biologists have been collection information on the snake and that they agree the biggest threat is the loss of creatures that make up the snake's diet.

"The Mexican garter snake has been on our radar screen. We do know that it has threats," Slown said.

The Center for Biological Diversity argues that listing the snake as endangered would facilitate conservation of riparian habitats and species by prohibiting activities, such as grazing and groundwater pumping, that can destroy habitats.