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Environmentalists want Arizona's bald eagles on endangered list

PHOENIX (AP) - Three Arizona environmental groups have asked the federal government to recognize the Southwestern desert nesting bald eagle as a distinct population and list it as endangered to protect its habitat. "This eagle population faces extreme challenges to survive," said Dr. Robin Silver, who delivered the 137-page petition Wednesday to the Phoenix field office of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Silver, of the Center for Biological Diversity, said Arizona's bald eagles could be extinct in 57 years.

Among the factors threatening Southwestern eagles are loss of desert river habitat and nesting trees plus pollution by pesticides and heavy metals, according to Silver.

Experts say there are an estimated 160 adult birds remaining and they live mainly along the lower Salt and Verde rivers near the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Only 25 percent of Arizona fledglings survive to breed and they reproduce less successfully than other eagles.

Their survival is credited to an intricate nest watch program begun by Audubon

groups in the 1970s and managed by the Arizona Department of Game and Fish for the past 25 years.

The 137-page petition from the Center for Biological Diversity, Maricopa Audubon and the Arizona Audubon Council will now have a 90-day evaluation by federal officials.