

Group seeks protection for jaguar

[B. POOLE](#)

Tucson Citizen

The endangered jaguar has languished far too long without protection, and the federal government should do something about it, a nonprofit group said in a lawsuit filed Thursday in Tucson.

The Center for Biological Diversity sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to force the agency that oversees endangered species in the U.S. to declare habitat for the cats and to draw up a recovery plan to bring the species, of which about 100 exist in the wild, back to strength, the lawsuit said.

The Fish and Wildlife Service declined comment.

Because no habitat has been designated and no protection plan exists, the species is vulnerable, said Michael Robinson of the Center.

"It's getting no protection on the ground," Robinson said.

The jaguar was recognized as endangered as early as 1972, but it was not included when the Endangered Species Act passed the following year. The species was put on the U.S. list in 1997, the lawsuit said.

The nearest breeding population of the cats, which are mostly yellow and covered in familiar black spots, is about 120 miles south of Tucson, Robinson said.

Though sightings have been rare - just a handful in recent decades - a nonprofit group called the Borderlands Jaguar Detection Project has a Web site with 16 jaguar photos it says were taken with motion-triggered cameras in Arizona.

Jaguars have been hunted to near extinction in the U.S. by ranchers fearing for their livestock and by the federal government, which employed hunters in the 19th and 20th centuries to control predatory animals.

In a letter written in the 1950s and now filed with the Smithsonian Institution, Stanley Young, a former hunter for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, attributes a jaguar kill to Lee Parker near Mount Wrightson in December 1918.

The Associated Press contributed to this story