

Mail Tribune

August 24, 2005

Lawsuit filed to protect two Western salamander species

Federal reviews sought for the Siskiyou Mountains salamander and the more recently discovered Scott Bar salamander

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Mail Tribune

Five conservation groups filed suit Tuesday in a federal district court over the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's refusal to take steps to protect two salamander species unique to southwest Oregon and Northern California.

The lawsuit, filed in Portland, seeks a federal review of the Siskiyou Mountains salamander and the more recently discovered Scott Bar salamander to determine whether they should be added to the endangered species list.

"These salamanders are some of the rarest (amphibians) in North America," said Joseph Vaile of Ashland-based Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, one of the plaintiffs. "They are like a genetic blueprint, a unique representation of nature that is important to preserve in its own right, not to mention that salamanders play an important part in the food chain."

Other plaintiffs are the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz., the Eugene-based Cascadia Wildlands Project, the Environmental Protection Information Center in Garberville, Calif., and the Portland-

based Oregon Natural Resources Council.

The wildlife service rejected a petition by the groups to consider the salamanders for the endangered species list in July 2004.

In the Spring, you love the way it feels outside. Ever wish it felt the same way inside?

The groups contend the salamanders are threatened by development and old-growth logging because of their limited habitats.

"We did send a letter to the petitioner telling them we did not have the money to process that petition and that it was precluded by higher priorities," said Joan Jewett, spokeswoman for the wildlife service's Pacific Region. "That continues to be the situation for us."

The higher priorities are other species for which the agency already received petitions or those residing in more critical habitats, Jewett said.

There are about 286 species the agency has determined are in need of review, she said.

"There is not enough money to work on all of the court-ordered critical

habitats that are facing us and our backlog of listings," Jewett said.

Vaile said the rejection came as no surprise.

"The Bush administration has shown very little support for protecting endangered species," Vaile said. "It is unfortunate that instead of focusing on protecting these species, we have to file a complaint."

Until last spring, Scott Bar and Siskiyou Mountains salamanders were believed to be of the same species. Both are brown with white speckles and about four inches long.

The Scott Bar salamander, however, has a slightly larger head, shorter body and longer limbs, said Dave Clayton, a wildlife biologist in the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is found only in the Upper Applegate Valley and a small portion of the Klamath River Valley.

"The Scott Bar salamander has an even-smaller known distribution," Clayton said. "It only occurs primarily in the Scott Bar River drainage. It is the most restrictive range for the *Plethodon* (family of) sala-

manders."

Both salamanders live primarily underground, except in the spring when the weather is mild. Their diet consists largely of ants and other small insects.

"There hasn't been research done on habitat associated with the Scott Bar salamander," Clayton said. "However, there has been research on the Siskiyou Mountains and Del Norte salamanders, and that research suggests they need a moist environment associated with a closed canopy, old forests and rocky soil."

Clayton said the moisture allows the Siskiyou Mountains salamander and the Scott Bar salamander to breathe through their skin, as both lack lungs.