

Duluth News Tribune

Environmental groups sue U.S. Forest Service

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A coalition of 14 environmental groups from across the U.S. filed suit Thursday against the U.S. Forest Service, claiming the agency is reverting to national forest management rules that have been found illegal by a federal court.

The groups first sued based on forest management rules adopted in 2000 and won, then won again when they filed suit against rules adopted in 2005. The court issued a nationwide injunction prohibiting the Forest Service from implementing the 2005 regulations.

In April, in response to the injunction, Forest Service leaders in Washington issued a national directive to all regions to go back to the 2000 regulations — even though they already had been ruled against.

Marc Fink, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, a plaintiff in the suit, said the Forest Service is trying to do an end-run around protections for wildlife, fish, clean water and other natural resources, and is violating the National Environmental Protection Act.

“The Forest Service keeps digging itself further into a hole,” said Fink, who lives in Duluth. “If the agency wants to plan and implement projects on national forests, it must do so legally, under the 1982 regulations. While it may not like it, even the Bush administration must abide by the law.”

The groups insist the agency revert to 1982 forest management regulations, which are considered more protective of the environment. The suit was filed in federal court in California.

U.S. Forest Service spokesman Joe Walsh said from Washington, D.C., that he could not comment on the suit.