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Protecting Calif. Salamander to Cost \$367M

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Protecting the California tiger salamander as a threatened species will cost the state \$367 million in lost development opportunities over the next two decades, federal wildlife officials said Friday.

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service analysis estimated the economic impact of designating about 382,000 acres in 20 California counties as the salamander's "critical habitat" where development would be restricted.

The critical habitat designations for the California tiger salamander's central population — which includes populations in the San Joaquin Valley, Central Coast and San Francisco Bay area — were proposed in August last year, and a final rule is due by Aug. 10.

The Fish and Wildlife Service sent the analysis, prepared by Oakland-based Charles River Associates, to the Federal Register, opening a public comment period that will end Aug. 3.

According to the study, about 94 percent of the projected economic loss would be in urban counties with fast-rising housing prices. Critical habitat designations would cost \$131 million in Alameda County, \$91 million Contra Costa County and \$67 million in Monterey County. Santa Clara, San

Benito and Fresno counties would also face significant economic loss.

Scientists say the tiger salamander, a terrestrial amphibian that lives mostly underground in grasslands and woodlands, has lost 75 percent of its native habitat to urban sprawl and the invasion of nonnative species.