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Butterfly habitat plan comes under fire

Environmentalists criticized a proposal issued Thursday by federal wildlife officials that would cut by two-thirds the amount of land in western Riverside County and San Diego County that is considered crucial for the survival of an endangered butterfly.

The butterfly's habitat has been especially hard-hit by wildfires, urban sprawl and climate change, said Jeff Miller, conservation advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity.

"This is not a species that can afford to lose any more protections," Miller said.

But the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said some of the critical habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly is already protected under habitat conservation plans in the two counties.

The proposal to reduce the habitat protection from 171,605 acres to about 59,000 acres stems from a lawsuit filed by developers, the wildlife service said.