


Groups urge Lincoln not be sprayed

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 Two groups are seeking to block a proposal to spray sections of the Lincoln National Forest.

In a news release issued Thursday, the Forest Guardians and the Center for Biological Diversity said they have requested that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant emergency federal protection to the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly on Thursday.

The Forest Service announced earlier this week that it will go ahead with plans to spray the forest in an effort to eliminate the threat posed by two insects that are destroying and damaging trees.

Forest Service officials said Monday that a bacterial agent will be used, but won't be sprayed until the checkerspot butterfly begins hibernating. This is expected to occur some time in October or November.

The insects have affected several thousand acres in the Lincoln. Cloudcroft residents have already begun to spray, and the Forest Service intends to remove dead trees from areas around Cloudcroft.

According to the news release, "ongoing insecticide spraying in the village of Cloudcroft and proposed spraying on adjacent Lincoln National Forest land prompted the request" from the two groups.

The Forest Guardians state the butterfly occurs on less than 2,000 acres centered around Cloudcroft. The organization also states that the insecticides being sprayed target budworms and looper caterpillars, but can also kill checkerspots.

"Current insect control in Cloudcroft poses an acute risk to the imperiled checkerspot butterfly," stated Nicole Rosmarino of the Forest Guardians. "Emergency protection for this rare butterfly is needed to keep it from vanishing forever."

The Center for Biological Diversity formally petitioned the Forest Service to protect the Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in January 1999.

The butterfly was on track for federal protection in September 2001, when the Forest Service issued a proposed rule to list the checkerspot as endangered and proposed to designate all of its habitat as critical habitat.

The Forest Service withdrew the proposal in December 2004, stating that threats to the butterfly had been reduced.

The groups filing the butterfly petition Thursday pointed out that if the listing had been finalized, the butterfly would not face the current emergency.

"The Sacramento Mountains checkerspot butterfly is a unique and irreplaceable icon of the Sacramento Mountains," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. "The Bush administration's denial of protection for this little critter in its tiny home range must be reversed before it's too late."

Additional evidence presented by the two groups in Thursday's petition concerns impacts to the checkerspot from climate change. According to the group's petition to the Forest Service, "the butterfly is particularly at risk from extreme weather and other climate change effects, given its extremely limited range and its close relationship with a narrowly distributed plant, the New Mexico penstemon. This penstemon is the butterfly's primary host plant and the only plant known to provide butterfly egg-laying sites."

According to the news release, the plant is restricted to the Sacramento Mountains. Just a slight shift in the plant's distribution, productivity or other factors could further imperil the checkerspot, the groups argued.

