

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-salamander28-2009apr28,0,135726.story>  
From the Los Angeles Times

## Fish and Wildlife Service to study a stealthy amphibian

If the Tehachapi slender salamander, which lives north of L.A., becomes a protected species, urban growth could be limited.  
By Louis Sahagun

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Jeremy Nichols says he became smitten by the Tehachapi slender salamander when he ran across an article about it four years ago in a book about North American reptiles and amphibians.

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### FOR THE RECORD:

Tehachapi salamander: An article in Tuesday's Section A about a federal study of the Tehachapi slender salamander incorrectly said the amphibian was first identified by noted herpetologist Robert C. Stebbins. In fact, the *Batrachoseps stebbinsi* was named for him. Also, the first name of Ilene Anderson, a spokeswoman for the Center for Biological Diversity, was misspelled as Ilene. —

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The brick-red and stealthy *Batrachoseps stebbinsi* clings to existence in two canyons about 13 miles apart and separated by a freeway 60 miles north of Los Angeles. It lives mostly underground and, without lungs, absorbs oxygen through its skin. When threatened, it can coil its body like a snake.

"I'm not a scientist, but I know enough to understand that these little guys are not adept at crossing freeways," Nichols, 29, of Denver, said in an interview Monday.

So Nichols, acting as a private citizen, filed a petition in 2006 requesting that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service list the salamander as an endangered species because of ongoing threats to its subterranean haunts. He cited Tejon Ranch Co.'s development plans, mining, livestock grazing and road construction as threats.

The agency agreed on Wednesday to study the matter, declaring in the Federal Register that Nichols' petition presented "substantial scientific or commercial information" to warrant a comprehensive review.

That could see the broad-headed, long-limbed salamander -- first scientifically identified in 1968 by noted herpetologist Robert C. Stebbins -- brought under federal Endangered Species Act protections within a few years.

The announcement does not mean that the Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to list the species, just "that there was enough information presented in the petition for us to take an in-depth look," said Lois Grunwald, a spokeswoman for the agency.

Ilene Anderson, a spokeswoman for the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit conservation organization, praised the move on behalf of a creature already listed as threatened by the state of California.

"If we're going to save California's natural heritage, including this salamander, more land needs to be protected from urban sprawl," she said in a statement.

Barry Zoeller, spokesman for Tejon Ranch, said the company has no plans to develop any area "were the Tehachapi slender salamander is found or may be found."

Unlike many salamanders, the enigmatic species is a terrestrial breeder that lays its eggs in moist soils deep beneath rocky north-facing canyon slopes.

It is unknown how long it lives, and no juveniles have been seen in the wild or reported.

Nichols, a climate program director with Wild Earth Guardians, an environmental group based in Santa Fe, N.M., said he's never seen a living Tehachapi slender salamander.

But he added, "The canyons where it is found are now on my list of places in the West to visit someday."

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