



Slippery future -Salamander plan needs blessing of federal officials, the courts

Article published - Nov 15, 2005

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors took a step in the right direction last week in approving a model new plan for preserving endangered species, a plan that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is certain to embrace.

The question remains, however, whether the courts will receive this system in the same way.

In some ways this plan for preserving the California tiger salamander is a house of cards - one that has to keep standing long enough to meet a court-ordered deadline of Dec. 1. The Fish and Wildlife Service needs to have a conservation plan in place by that day, as part of a lawsuit settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The county's plan, adapted from the plan developed by the Santa Rosa Plain Conservation Strategy Team, calls for spending an estimated \$400 million to purchase wetlands and set up a fund to ensure the protection of tiger salamanders. The money would come primarily from fees paid by developers.

The problem is that, as approved, the plan is very general with many of the details still to be worked out. The county is left to hope that the courts will cut the Fish and Wildlife Service some slack to work out the kinks. Otherwise, federal officials will have to go back to the tired method of designating critical habitat - a system that is complex, inflexible and, ultimately, leaves salamanders no assurance of being protected.

© The Press Democrat