

MAY 2006

Common Ground

State Stomps Salamanders

Dock of the Bay

Scientists were delighted last May when the journal *Herpetologica* revealed that California was home to a previously unknown species of amphibian — the petite and perky Scott Bar salamander, a creature with the smallest range of any known salamander.

Upon hearing the glad news, the California Department of Forestry (CDF) made haste to amend at least four timber harvest plans to allow logging in the wee salamander's habitat.

“Rather than heralding the discovery of a new species,” said Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild) campaign director Joseph Vaile, “the California Department of Forestry is rushing to wipe out the rare critters’ habitat.” Moreover, Vaile noted, the way the agencies went about it “left the public in the dark, violating public trust and ignoring their responsibilities to protect California’s natural heritage for future generations.”

Noah Greenwald, conservation biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) was also aghast that state agencies would place the newly discovered salamander “on the road to extinction, doing everything in their power to ensure timber companies are allowed to log this unique species’ habitat.”

Ironically, because of its status as a biological newbie, the Scotts Bar salamander has not yet qualified for protection under California’s Endangered Species Act. Last June, conservationists petitioned the US Fish and Wildlife Service to list both the Scotts Bar and Siskiyou Mountains Salamanders under the federal ESA. An initial decision is expected by May.

Meanwhile, State Fish and Game bureaucrats are moving to kick the Siskiyou Mountains salamander off the state ESA list, a move that has been sharply criticized by scientists.

The CBD, KS Wild, and the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) have sued the state

agencies for approving logging within the salamander’s fragile habitat. The lawsuit is intended to extend additional protections to the Scott Bar salamander by giving the public a voice in critical management decisions and holding the agencies accountable for their actions.