

The Oregonian

WEDNESDAY ♦ AUGUST 24, 2005

Suit aims to protect rare salamanders

By **JOE ROJAS-BURKE**

Rare salamanders found only in southwestern Oregon and northern California could receive protection under the Endangered Species Act as a result of a lawsuit filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Portland.

Five conservation groups say the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service illegally ignored deadlines for responding to their petitions to list the Siskiyou Mountains and Scott Bar salamanders as threatened or endangered species.

The groups are asking the court to order the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make a preliminary finding within 30 days.

The Scott Bar salamander wasn't identified until earlier this year. The related Siskiyou Mountains salamander was discovered in 1963. Conservation groups contend that both are threatened by the logging of old-growth forest habitat, and that the species' slow, erratic reproduction puts them at high risk of extinction.

A spokeswoman for the Fish and Wildlife Service said that staffing and money limits prevented agency officials from responding to the salamander petitions amid competing priorities including court orders demanding action on other species.