

Suit filed over toad habitat

By the Californian

A pair of conservation groups filed suit in Los Angeles federal court this week to overturn the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's April decision to slash the amount of "critical habitat" for the endangered arroyo toad in Southern California to 12,000 acres from 478,000.

The groups are the Center for Biological Diversity and Christians Caring for Creation.

The remaining 12,000 acres is in Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. That is a fraction of the 478,000-acre territory proposed by the federal agency for special treatment in 2000.

Agency officials said earlier they removed much of the targeted territory for economic considerations. In the case of Southwest Riverside County, prime habitat for the small, buff-colored toad near Vail Lake was left out because it already is protected under a regional conservation plan. A stretch of San Juan Creek along the Riverside-Orange county line was left out for the same reason.

Critical habitat is a federal

designation that triggers a review to determine whether development on a particular property will harm a rare species of animal or plant.