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ENDANGERED SPECIES: Critical habitat designation sought for Delmarva fox squirrel

By Molly Murry
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The Center for Biological Diversity has asked for a critical habitat designation for the Delmarva fox squirrel, an endangered mammal rarely seen even in its natural habitat on Maryland's Delmarva Peninsula.

The designation request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in response to a development boom in the 2000s and would combat threats to the fox squirrel's habitat from logging, urban sprawl and climate change.

"The fox squirrel has very specific habitat needs, and only a small percentage of suitable habitat remains," said Bethany Cotton, a staff attorney with the center. "It is essential those areas be protected to save the fox squirrel from extinction."

The designation would have ramifications for landowners who have previously petitioned the state attorney

general with concerns that federal guidelines for endangered species would limit their property rights. But Edward Launay, president of ERI Consultants, an environmental consulting firm, said that he did not believe the designation would have much more impact than the squirrel's listing on the federal Endangered Species List already does.

The fox squirrel was listed as endangered in the 1960s, among the first species to make the list. The population then had disappeared from much of its historic area