
Los Angeles Times

JUNE 29, 2011

U.S. judge acts to help endangered species in California

Federal agencies are given six months to enhance protections in four Southern California national forests for 40 endangered species

By Louis Sahagun
Los Angeles Times

A U.S. District Court judge Tuesday ordered three federal agencies to “take all necessary measures” to better protect 40 endangered species in four national forests in Southern California.

Judge Marilyn Hall Patel’s action followed a 2009 federal court decision that management plans for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino national forests failed to ensure that human activities not jeopardize already-imperiled plants and animals.

Patel gave the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Forest



The California condor is among 40 endangered species that a federal judge's order seeks to protect. (Scott Frier / Associated Press)

Service six months to develop and implement long-term safeguards for the 40 species, which include the California condor and California gnatcatcher. The forest managers will have to develop a comprehensive program to reduce activities threatening the survival of the few steelhead trout

left in the Los Padres and Cleveland national forests.

They were also ordered to report on the impacts that suction dredge mining in the San Gabriel River has had on the Santa Ana sucker, and “explain why such mining should not be immediately halted.” Suction dredge mining, which is used to separate gold from stream gravel, harms water quality by spreading silt and sand.

Concrete river channels, dams and pollution caused by urban runoff have played roles in the suckers’ decline, scientists say. Today, the fish clings to existence in small, shaded stretches of the Santa Ana and San Gabriel rivers and Big Tujunga Creek.

Officials from the agencies were not immediately available for comment. Ileene Anderson, spokeswoman for the Center for Biological Diversity, which sued over the agencies' forest management plans, said, "We're ecstatic. We always felt we had a strong case, and on Tuesday, the judge agreed."

Pending development of the new protection plans, Patel ordered the U.S. Forest Service to halt construction and public access in the vicinity of Williamson Rock and Little Rock Creek Road in the Angeles National Forest, popular hiking areas that are also home to endangered mountain yellow-legged frogs and arroyo toads. Both amphibians have lost nearly all their historic habitat.

In addition, Patel closed the Cherry Canyon area of the Los Padres National Forest to recreational shooting.

Kim Delfino, California program director for the Defenders of Wildlife, said, "The lesson of this ruling is

this: These federal agencies can no longer get by simply saying, 'Nothing is going to happen to these species — trust us.'"

In addition to the condor and gnatcatcher, animals and plants expected to benefit from the ruling include the San Joaquin fox, Steller sea lion, Smith's blue butterfly, ash-gray Indian paintbrush and bird-footed checker-bloom.