

Environmental groups sue San Francisco over Sharp Park

BY ELIZABETH PFEFFER

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Environmental groups that had warned the city of San Francisco of legal action if it failed to protect threatened species at Sharp Park showed Wednesday that they weren't bluffing.

Six conservation organizations filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in San Francisco alleging Endangered Species Act violations pertaining to the endangered San Francisco garter snake and federally threatened California red-legged frog populations on the San Francisco-owned golf course in Pacifica.

Attorney Brent Plater, executive director of Wild Equity Institute, one of the plaintiffs in the case, said course maintenance, such as the pumping of Horse Stable Pond where frogs lay eggs and mowing the greens where both species use rodent holes to hibernate in the dry season, is killing the imperiled creatures.

A red-legged frog egg mass found "desiccated and partially frozen" above the pond's waterline Tuesday was the final evidence the conservation

groups needed to take the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department to court.

"It's been mind-boggling to think they've essentially put a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound and claimed they're protecting the species," Plater said.

Jeff Miller, of the Center for Biological Diversity, another plaintiff in the suit, slammed San Francisco for taking this long to come to an agreeable conclusion for the financially challenged golf course, which has been the subject of a long-running and contentious debate pitting golfers against environmentalists.

"Sharp Park environmental programs have been ongoing for a while, and with their financial problems mounting, it's time for the city to actually start doing something," he said.

The city released a report last year that considered various ways the 412-acre park could keep its historic golf course and protect the frogs, but the findings were criticized by the group as nonscientific.

Elton Pon, a San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department spokes-

man, said the lawsuit was not a surprise, but the department plans to take 30 days to consider its response.

"Our No. 1 priority has been and always will be the protection of the wildlife at Sharp Park for the past several years," he said. "We have been working with land managers, stakeholders and even the plaintiffs themselves to identify the best source of action in terms of protecting wildlife and also keeping the recreational pursuits out there."

Pon added that the department doesn't believe eliminating golf is necessarily the answer. The city is monitoring 159 egg masses this year and claims it is a record high.

protecting endangered species
Two animal types on the golf course.

California red-legged frog: A desiccated, frozen egg mass was found above the waterline Tuesday.

San Francisco garter snake: The species is threatened by mowing the golf course greens.