



Federal government agrees to take another look at whether longfin smelt are endangered

By Matt Weiser

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Federal officials have agreed in a legal settlement to reconsider the endangered status of the longfin smelt, a small fish native to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Two environmental groups sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in November after the agency denied their petition to protect the longfin under the Endangered Species Act. At that time, the agency concluded the Delta population of longfin was not distinct from others on the Pacific Coast.

In a settlement announced today, the service agreed to conduct another review that includes a review of the entire longfin population on the Pacific Coast. It must submit a listing decision by Sept. 30.

Jeff Miller, a conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity, claimed the service improperly concluded in November that Delta longfin

are not imperiled because they can interbreed with other populations that range as far as Washington State. In fact, he said, there is no proof that this occurs.

"There is evidence that it is genetically distinct, and it's certainly geographically distinct," said Miller, who partnered with The Bay Institute on the lawsuit.

The longfin is slightly larger than the more widely known Delta smelt. Both species have been in a steep population decline since 2002.