

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Short take: Life is hell for the hellbender



An Ozark hellbender salamander is kept by biologists working on a captive breeding program for the St. Louis Zoo. The salamanders' population has decreased dramatically in the last 20 years. (Teak Phillips/St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

February 02, 2013 • By the Editorial Board

This editorial page long has been a fan of the Ozark hellbender, one of the biggest salamanders in the world, an animal so ugly it's beautiful. A few years back, we supported students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who wanted to change the name of the UMSL sports teams to the Hellbenders. Sadly, the university's administration, which apparently knows nothing about sports merchandising, went with Tritons instead.

The good news on the hellbender front is that they've now been bred in captivity. The bad news, according to a lawsuit that two conservation groups intend to file against the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Service, is that poor management in the Mark Twain National Forest is further endangering an already endangered species and its habitat.

The Missouri Coalition for the Environment and the Center for Biological Diversity say that logging and other activities in the forest are polluting the rivers and making life harder for the hellbender and four other endangered species.

We hope the federal agencies will show some hellbender love. When you're an ugly 2-foot-long brown salamander with a scary name, life is hard enough.