

SUMMIT COUNTY CITIZEN VOICE

Feds pick up the pace on endangered species listings



A new climate change study casts doubt on the ability of wolverines to survive in the face of climate change.
PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

November 30, 2013

By Summit Voice

Conservation and recovery efforts still hampered by funding shortfall

FRISCO — You'd need more than all your fingers and toes to count the plants and animals that are in danger of extinction in the U.S. But all in all, 2013 was a good year for endangered species protection, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

The organization last week praised the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for adding 81 species to the list in 2013, making some progress

in whittling down the list of 757 species covered under a landmark agreement that requires the federal agency to speed listing determinations. So for the first time since the 1970s, the number of plants and animals on the waiting list for Endangered Species Act protection has dropped below 150.

"It is so exciting to see imperiled wildlife from around the country get the Endangered Species Act protection that will save them from extinction. The Fish and Wildlife Service deserves credit for the excellent progress it's making protecting our most endangered animals and plants," said Tierra Curry, a conservation biologist at the Center.

In the past year dozens of critically imperiled species gained final protection, including Hawaiian flowers and damselflies, freshwater mussels from the Southeast with names like “fuzzy pigtoe” and “rabbitsfoot,” and butterflies from the Pacific Northwest and Las Vegas. Also protected were the Florida bonneted bat, salamanders from Texas, and a fish from West Virginia called the diamond darter.

“Candidates” are species that have been found to warrant protection, but instead of gaining protection are placed on a waiting list where they may languish for decades. The Fish and Wildlife Service issues an annual notice of review describing its progress over the year in addressing the backlog.

During the past year the Service issued proposals to protect dozens of new species under the Act including the wolverine, lesser prairie chicken, Yosemite toad, red knot, a shorebird along the Atlantic Coast, and the northern long-eared bat, which was once found in 39 states before its population was decimated by a fungal disease called white-nose syndrome.

Also among the proposed were the western yellow-billed cuckoo, which only lives along desert streams, four kinds of pocket gophers from Washington state, and butterflies from Florida and the Dakotas.

The vast majority of the 146 species still on the waiting list will receive listing proposals in the next three years. Species still waiting include the Pacific walrus, eastern gopher tortoise, west coast fisher, Lower Colorado River roundtail chub, Sonoran desert tortoise, several types of Hawaiian yellow-faced bees, and the Black Warrior waterdog, a large salamander from Alabama.

In its latest review the Service elevated the priority of several species, including the southern Idaho ground squirrel, Washington ground squirrel, Kentucky arrow darter and Cumberland arrow darter, the latter two of which are colorful fish threatened by mountaintop-removal coal mining in Tennessee and Kentucky.

“To build on the great progress in listing species, we urge Congress to designate the funding for endangered species recovery that the Service desperately needs to accomplish its goals. Congress must recognize that protecting endangered species also protects public health and the long-term well-being of our country, which should be a fiscal priority,” said Curry.