

THE SACRAMENTO BEE



3 Sierra Nevada amphibians get federal protections

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- Federal wildlife officials on Friday granted Endangered Species Act protections to three species of Sierra Nevada amphibians.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that two types of yellow-legged frog are endangered species, and that the Yosemite toad is threatened. The rule becomes final June 30.

All three species once thrived in the mountains, but they are now found mostly at high elevations in national parks and public forests in California.

Peer-reviewed government studies found that the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog population declined by nearly 70 percent, while the separate mountain yellow-legged frog species declined by more than 80 percent. The Yosemite toad's population is down about 50 percent.

The service says habitat destruction, climate change and disease are all factors in the decline.

"While other moderate and minor level threats including historic logging, mining, grazing pressures and recreational use

were evaluated, they were not considered significant factors in our determination," Jennifer Norris, the service's Sacramento field supervisor, said in a news release.

The listing gives the animals legal protections from human-caused impacts that threaten their survival, and sets a series of steps to help them recover.

The two species of yellow-legged frogs are similar looking, ranging from 1 ½ to just more than 3 inches long. They come in many colors, including red and gray, and emit a garlic smell when they're disturbed by predators.

Yosemite toads produce toxins to deter predators, and range in size between 1 and 3 inches.

Environmental advocacy group the Center for Biological Diversity has sued to increase the speed with which the service determines listing status for species. They applauded Friday's announcement.

"Threats like toxic pesticides hurt these animals even in the high Sierras," Collette Adkins Giese, a biologist and lawyer for the center, said in a press release. "But now, with the protections of the Endangered Species Act, we can do what's necessary to save these rare amphibians from extinction."

