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WILDLIFE: Lawsuit filed over endangered frogs

BY JANET ZIMMERMAN
STAFF WRITER
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An environmental group sued the federal government on Thursday, Feb. 13, for failing to develop a recovery plan for the endangered mountain yellow-legged frog, a species once plentiful in the San Jacinto Mountains.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed suit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because the agency did not adopt a plan within the required 2 1/2 years after frog was won protection under the Endangered Species Act. The frog was listed in 2002.

A recovery plan details such actions as habitat restoration, predator removal and other steps necessary to bring a species back from near extinction.

“Without a concrete plan for recovery, these increasingly rare frogs are vulnerable to threats like exotic predators and habitat destruction,” said Collette Adkins Giese, an attorney and biologist with the group. “In the 12 years



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The endangered mountain yellow-legged frog was once plentiful in the San Jacinto Mountains.

they have been waiting for a recovery plan, Southern California mountain yellow-legged frogs have continued to slide toward the brink of extinction.”

Fish and Wildlife officials did not return a telephone call Thursday afternoon.

The frogs are the subject of a long-running and elaborate effort by the San Diego Zoo’s Institute for Conservation Research to reintroduce them into mountain streams. They

were once common in the San Jacinto, San Bernardino and San Gabriel mountains.

Their population in the wild has dwindled to about 200, largely because of drought, predation by non-native fish, disease, contaminants and elevated levels of ultraviolet radiation.

The institute has been breeding the frogs in its laboratory since shortly after they were captured from a drying stream in 2006.

In June, scientists released 100 juvenile froglets into a stream at the James San Jacinto Mountains Reserve near Idyllwild and a nearby stream on U.S. Forest Service land. About 20 of the amphibians were fitted with radio belts to track their movements for up to 30 days after their release.

Those with the transmitters remained in the stream, and biologists said they will try to count them again in spring to see how they fared over the winter