

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife to take closer look at pesticides

By Dana M. Nichols  
Record Staff Writer  
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**SAN ANDREAS** - Six widely used pesticides will be evaluated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the next two years to determine whether they are being properly regulated to avoid having them contribute to the extinction of the California red-legged frog.

The agency agreed to look at the effects of the pesticides to settle a lawsuit filed three years ago by the Center for Biological Diversity.

The review of the effects of the pesticides, formally called a “consultation” by federal officials, will be one of the first under a recently reformed system for pesticide evaluation by federal agencies that takes effect in 2014.

The National Academy of Sciences Research Committee in a report published at the end of April had recommended reforms to eliminate conflicting risk assessment methods by different agencies. Now, federal evaluations of pesticide risks to species listed under the Endangered Species Act will follow a unified protocol under which they will use recommended scientific “best practices” to evaluate issues, including indirect effects such as whether a pesticide is reducing a listed species’ food supply, sub-lethal effects of

### Pesticide effects to be reviewed

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over the next two years will study the effects of seven pesticides on the California red legged frog, a species that is listed as threatened with extinction under the Endangered Species Act.



Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service

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chemicals that may weaken the species without directly killing it and the effects of combining pesticides with other compounds.

In the case of red-legged frogs, which live in the Sierra foothills including in Calaveras County, the analysis will include issues such as whether pesticides drifting into the foothills from farms miles away in the Central Valley are harming the frogs.

“You can impact these species without being right next to them,” said Justin Augustine, an

attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity. “That isn’t a minor issue,” he said. “Drift is a major issue. We definitely expect that to be a central aspect of a biological opinion.”

If federal biologists conclude that pesticides drifting from farms near Lodi and Stockton are harming frogs, that, in turn, could mean new restrictions on using the chemicals. Currently, requirements are that pesticide applications must be at least 60 feet from frog habitats.

The pesticides that will be evaluated are glyphosate, malathion, simazine, pendimethalin, permethrin, methomyl and myclobutanil. Glyphosate, an herbicide, is known by the brand name RoundUp and is among the world’s most widely used pesticides.

The seven are only a fraction of the 64 pesticides that the Environmental Protection Agency concluded might affect the frogs and which ultimately must be evaluated. Representatives for both the biological diversity center and the Fish and Wildlife Service said that once the review of the first seven pesticides is completed in 2015, they will take up the question of evaluating the rest of the list.

Malathion is another well-known pesticide. It was used for aerial spraying over San Joaquin County and elsewhere in California in the 1980s to combat the Mediterranean fruit fly.

Permethrin is part of a class of pesticides called pyrethroids that had been hailed in recent years because they are less toxic to birds and mammals than organophosphate compounds, such as malathion. Permethrin is widely used to treat clothing sold in sporting goods stores to hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Pyrethroids, however, turn out to be dangerous to aquatic organisms and bond easily to particles in sediments in waterways, making them a possible risk to the food chain for amphibians.

Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman Claire Cassel said in an email that while the evaluation could result in new restrictions, it is also possible it will result in fewer restrictions on the pesticides.

One difficulty in clearing the backlog of chemicals due for review has been that federal agencies have different mandates when evaluating pesticides.

The EPA, which registers pesticides for use, is required to make sure that the pesticides won’t cause “unreasonable” harm to humans or the environment. That standard means that the agency considers things such as the economic benefits of a pesticide and then decides whether the benefits outweigh the harm caused.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, in contrast, is charged to prevent harm to species covered by the Endangered Species Act.

Jonathan Evans, a staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said the EPA’s mandate to consider whether harm is “unreasonable” means the agency does not, in effect, analyze whether pesticides can lead to extinction.

“There’s a whole range of problems with EPA’s analysis. They didn’t analyze sublethal effects,” Evans said.

Erica Fleishman, a researcher at the John Muir Institute of the Environment at the University of California, Davis, served on the National Academy of Sciences committee that studied the way the EPA and other federal agencies had been responding to questions about threats posed by pesticides to species protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Fleishman does not agree with Evans' view that the EPA failed to consider the full range of effects, including sub-lethal effects. She said the issue wasn't that the agencies including the EPA didn't look at all the effects, but that they had different methods.

Fleishman noted that the committee's recommendations did not address specific pesticides or specific species.

Still, environmentalists say they are hopeful that the federal government's new, more unified approach to pesticides will offer better protection for endangered species such as the red-legged frog.

"After decades of inaction by EPA, we are beginning to see some progress," Evans said.

Evans, however, also said he does not expect the review will result in dramatic new restrictions. Instead, changes might be something like limiting pesticide applications during high winds, he said.

Bruce Blodgett, executive director of the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau, agrees that the additional scientific review is unlikely to result in dramatic regulatory changes. But Blodgett said that's because he believes the EPA had already done the work to properly evaluate and regulate chemicals so they don't harm endangered species.

"This is nothing more than fundraising," he said of the lawsuit settlement, in which the Center for Biological Diversity won the right to have its attorneys' costs reimbursed by federal agencies. "We don't believe it will result in any significant changes, because the studies are already in place."