

## Conservationists to sue Fish and Wildlife for stalling on reptile ESA status



The lack of response to that complaint prompted today's notice of intent to sue the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to Sally Jewel, the current head of the DOI.

According to the Center, species listed are the western pond turtle, southern rubber boa, western spadefoot, foothill yellow-legged frog, Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizard, sandstone night lizard and nine salamanders.

The Center is seeking ESA protection for 16 California reptiles  
Center for Biological Diversity

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At a time when species are going extinct at an alarming rate, the Center for Biological Diversity is stepping up legal action to protect wildlife great and small, including 16 dwindling California amphibians and reptiles.

The Center first filed a petition for the same 16 species to get Endangered Species Act consideration due to climate change and habitat destruction in 2012 when Ken Salazar was Secretary of the Department of Interior.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service was required to make an initial finding within 90 days of receiving the petition about whether protections might be warranted.

But more than two years later, the agency has not acted.

"California is home to some of the country's most fascinating scaly and slimy creatures," said Collette Adkins Giese, a Center biologist and lawyer focused on protecting amphibians and reptiles. "Although few people have heard of, let alone seen, a relictual slender salamander or sandstone night lizard,

these unique species are an important part of the web of life that makes California unique. With the help of the Endangered Species Act, we can do what's necessary to save these rare amphibians and reptiles from extinction."

The following information is from the Center's statement:

Due to unsustainable logging practices, toxic pesticides, climate change and other human causes, nearly one in four amphibians and reptiles is at risk of dying out, scientists say. In fact, although they've been around for hundreds of millions of years and survived every major extinction period, now, due largely to human impacts, amphibians and reptiles are dying off at up to 10,000 times the historic extinction rate.

The loss is alarming because these creatures play important roles as predators and prey in their ecosystems and are valuable indicators of environmental health.

"There's broad scientific consensus that turtles, snakes, frogs, lizards and salamanders face a profound, human-driven extinction crisis that requires swift action," said Adkins Giese. "The Endangered Species Act has a nearly perfect record of stopping animals from going extinct — it's hands-down our best tool for saving these guys."

The Center was joined in its petition for these 16 species and other amphibians and reptiles by several renowned scientists and herpetologists, including E.O. Wilson, Thomas Lovejoy and Michael Lannoo. More than 200 scientists sent a letter asking the Service to review the status of the petitioned animals.

The 90-day finding is the first in a series of required decisions and simply compels the Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether the petition presents sufficient information to warrant further consideration, a process that requires few agency resources