

counterpunch

Lawsuit Launched Over Forest Service's Failure to Protect Rare California Frogs, Toads From Grazing



CENTER for BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Jenny Loda

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OAKLAND, CA - The Center for Biological Diversity today filed a notice of intent to sue the U.S. Forest Service for authorizing livestock grazing on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest without considering the potential impacts to federally protected Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads.

Livestock grazing and other activities on Forest Service lands have contributed to the declines of both amphibians. But before approving grazing on a series of allotments earlier this year on the Humboldt-Toiyabe, the Forest Service did not consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that livestock grazing would not jeopardize the survival of the protected frogs and toads, in violation of the Endangered Species Act.



Yosemite toad by Lucas Wilkinson, U.S. Forest Service. Photos are available for media use.

"The Forest Service shrugged off its duty to ensure that high-elevation livestock grazing in the Sierra Nevada doesn't harm these rare species," said Jenny Loda, a biologist and attorney with the Center whose work is dedicated to protecting rare amphibians and reptiles. "Yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads are already in serious trouble. The last thing they need is more sheep coming in and fouling some of the last habitat they have left."

Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads occur at high elevations in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, generally ranging between 4,500 feet and 12,000 feet. Both species have suffered severe popu-

lation declines and losses throughout their ranges, leading to Endangered Species Act protections in 2014.

Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs have suffered dramatic declines in range and numbers due to habitat destruction and degradation from activities like grazing, disease, predation by nonnative trout, pesticides and climate change.

The musical mating calls of Yosemite toads were once a common pleasure for visitors to the High Sierra. But the toads have now disappeared from many areas and suffered population losses, including in Yosemite National Park, where they were first discovered and given their name. Yosemite toads are threatened primarily by livestock grazing, climate change and pesticides. Both species, when abundant, play a vital link in energy and nutrient cycling for properly functioning meadows, ponds and adjacent forest ecosystems. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, livestock grazing is a threat to both species and may also limit their recovery.

“The fate of Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads is closely linked to proper management of the public lands they call home,” Loda said. “We must ensure that these lands are managed to support the recovery of these endangered species and that poor management doesn’t further contribute to their demise.”

At the Center for Biological Diversity, we believe that the welfare of human beings is deeply linked to nature - to the existence in our world of a vast diversity of wild animals and plants. Because diversity has intrinsic value, and because its loss impoverishes society, we work to secure a future for all species, great and small, hovering on the brink of extinction. We do so through science, law, and creative media, with a focus on protecting the lands, waters, and climate that species need to survive.