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AP

Lawsuit seeks protection for crayfish from coal mining

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Two protected crayfish species are being harmed by coal mining in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia, according to a federal lawsuit from an environmental group.

The Center for Biological Diversity alleges the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is late in designating habitat areas for the crayfish.

The Big Sandy crayfish and Guyandotte River crayfish were protected by the Endangered Species Act in 2016 because of habitat loss and water pollution, the suit says.

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife spokesman declined to comment because the lawsuit is pending.

The suit, filed Wednesday in West Virginia, said the crayfish are “highly imperiled due to declining water quality and habitat loss from coal mining and urban development within their watersheds.”

Perrin De Jong, an attorney with the center, said disturbances from surface mining move sediment into the streambed, disturbing the crayfish’s habitat.

“Protecting the habitat of these unique species will help prevent their extinction and protect water quality for local residents,” de Jong said in a news release. “These rare crayfish could be wiped out by the mines.”

The group wants a judge to compel the agency to designate habitat areas. They said the Guyandotte River crayfish has lost more than 90 percent of its range and is now only found in Wyoming County, West Virginia.

The Guyandotte crayfish is listed as an endangered species and the Big Sandy crayfish as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, according to the lawsuit.