



To save salamander, feds to protect 400,000 acres in California

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Some 400,000 acres of breeding ponds and adjacent uplands in California – much of it in the Central Valley – need protection from development, according to a final recovery plan for the threatened central California population of the California tiger salamander released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The recovery plan — which comes more than a decade after the amphibian received Endangered Species Act protection — is in accordance with a legal settlement between the agency and the Center for Biological Diversity.

“With a recovery plan we can fight threats like habitat destruction that have pushed these extraordinary salamanders to the brink of extinction,” says Jenny Loda, a biologist and attorney with the Center working to protect rare amphibians and reptiles.

“This plan gives us hope for one of our most imperiled salamanders.”

The recovery plan focuses primarily on alleviating the threat of habitat loss and fragmentation by permanently protecting breeding ponds and adjacent uplands throughout the salamander’s range. The little amphibian with its sporty white-dotted black skin lives in 23 counties along the foothills of California’s Central Valley and Inner Coast Range.

The plan also calls for site-specific management and monitoring plans for the protected lands. Those will both ensure continued management suitability and deal with other threats to the species, such as contaminants, non-native predators, disease and climate change.

“Protecting the wild places these unique tiger salamanders need to survive won’t be easy, but we can’t afford to lose these beautiful amphibians forever,” says Ms. Loda. “I hope federal, state and local agencies, as well as developers and farmers, will all step up to support the important work of recovery.”

Although central California tiger salamanders have been protected under the Endangered Species Act for more than a decade, the Fish and Wildlife Service had not developed a required recovery plan to guide their management.

In April 2012 the Center sued the agency for its failure to develop such a plan; the plan released Monday is the result of the December 2012 settlement agreement that resulted from this lawsuit.

Recovery plans are the main tool for identifying actions necessary to save endangered species from extinction and eventually remove their protection under the Endangered Species Act. Research by the Center has found that species with dedicated recovery plans for two or more years are far more likely to be improving than those without.

The California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*) is a large, stocky, terrestrial salamander with a broad, rounded snout and black, polka-dotted body. The amphibians are restricted to vernal pools and seasonal ponds in grassland and oak savannah communities, where they spend most of their lives in underground burrows. The primary cause of their decline is the loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitat through human activities and encroachment of invasive species.

The central California population of California tiger salamanders was listed as a threatened species in 2004. This species' historical range encompassed the San Joaquin-Sacramento river valleys, bordering foothills and coastal valleys of central California. Some populations are now isolated because highways create impassible barriers to migration.