

Conservationists want to get SoCal's mountain lions on the endangered list

By Leanne Suter

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The California Department of Fish and wildlife has released new pictures of the newest mountain lion tagged in the Santa Monica mountains.

P-75 is a young female and she is one of a shrinking number of big cats in Southern California that conservationists say are facing an extinction vortex.

The Center for Biological Diversity and the Mountain Lion Foundation have petitioned the state to protect six genetically distinct cougar clans by declaring them endangered.

"The ultimate goal of this petition is for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to list this evolutionarily significant unit of mountain lions as threatened species," said Korinna Domingo with the Mountain Lion Foundation.

If the petition is approved it would require Caltrans to build animal corridors in mountain lion habitats when constructing or expanding highways. The move could also take a toll on residential and commercial developments, which could be prohibited in certain areas.

Opponents say protecting the region's mountain lions may be at the expense of other species that may need more help.

The Mountain Lion Foundation, which co-sponsored the petition, says due to urban sprawl, in-breeding, the use of rat poison and the risk of becoming road kill these majestic animals are on the fast track to disappearing.

"The most recent research has shown that mountain lion populations in the Santa Ana's, with genetic depression, will be extinct in as little as 12 years," said Domingo.

And within the Santa Monica Mountains, that number is 15 years.

Brand new pictures of Southern California's most famous mountain lion -- P-22 who calls Griffith Park home -- show the cat looking healthy and happy. Fans say the pictures are proof of why the animals need to be protected.

"I'm all for it. I think that we need to be very conscious of the wildlife and animal life here on earth. It's precious and so far we haven't done a great job of that. So, I fully approve," said Claire Berger of Echo Park.

A preliminary decision from the Fish and Wildlife commission is expected by the end of the year