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Group threatens lawsuit over Endangered Species Act

- Missoulain staff
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Whitebark pine trees

Eliza Wiley, Independent Record

The Center for Biological Diversity filed a formal notice of intent to sue the Trump administration for failing to decide whether 274 plants and animals across the country be protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Center notes that in 2016 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a work plan to address a backlog of about 500 species that are waiting for protection decisions, but the Trump administration is keeping the agency from completing the decision.

Noah Greenwald, the endangered species director for the Center, said in a news release Wednesday that the 60-day notice seeks to ensure that decisions about protections are made as soon as possible.

"Scientists around the world are sounding the alarm about the extinction crisis but the Trump administration can't be bothered to lift a finger for hundreds of species that are in serious trouble," Greenwald said in the release. "Every day that protections are delayed is a day that these fascinating species are a step closer to extinction."

Plants and animals awaiting decisions range from the Alabama hickorynut to the Whites Sands pupfish in New Mexico. The only Montana species include the sicklefin chub, the sturgeon chub, whitebark pine, white-tailed ptarmigan and the American wolverine.

In the notice of intent to sue, the Center notes that in 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a seven-year work plan to partially address a backlog of more than 500 species awaiting 12-month determinations of whether they warrant listing as threatened or endangered.

"Despite widespread support for the work plan, the Trump administration has consistently failed to make the findings required in the workplan," the Center wrote in the letter. "... (W)e intend to seek a judicial order to compel the Service's action if the Service does not remedy these violations within the next 60 days."