



Rare Siskiyou Mountain Salamander At Heart Of Potential Lawsuit

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A rare salamander that only exists on the Oregon-California border is at the heart of a potential lawsuit against the federal government.

The Siskiyou Mountain salamander only lives among old growth trees and rocky slopes in the Siskiyou Mountains. It looks a lot like a giant earthworm, but with legs and big, black eyes.

Despite their small numbers, George Sexton of KS Wild, an Ashland-based conservation group, says these salamanders serve an important role in the ecosystem.

“They basically turn bugs into soil,” Sexton said. “And they do that in an area that needs that quite a bit. So when it comes to nutrient recycling, these salamanders are kind of heroes.”

Conservation groups want the salamander protected under the Endangered Species Act.



The Siskiyou Mountain Salamander only lives among old-growth trees and rocky slopes on the Oregon-California border.

But the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service didn’t respond to their petition, so they have filed a 60-day notice of their intent to sue.

When the salamander is crawling among old-growth trees in the Klamath National Forest, it’s usually in an area that’s already protected. But Sexton said those protections change after a wildfire strikes and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service moves quickly into clearing trees and debris.

“When they do the salvage logging, that’s often a rush job, particularly on the Klamath National Forest,” Sexton said. “They go into stands that would otherwise be protected, so places we thought we protected are now being logged rapidly by the Klamath National Forest.”

The agency has until June to respond to the groups’ notice. It wouldn’t comment on potential litigation.