

Midland Reporter-Telegram

Conservation groups launch lawsuit to protect dunes sagebrush lizard

By Midland Reporter-Telegram
Sunday, July 21, 2019

Conservation groups Defenders of Wildlife and Center for Biological Diversity on Friday filed a notice of their intent to sue the Trump administration for failing to protect the dunes sagebrush lizard under the ... more

Conservation groups Defenders of Wildlife and Center for Biological Diversity on Friday filed a notice of their intent to sue the Trump administration for failing to protect the dunes sagebrush lizard under the Endangered Species Act.

“Members of the Permian Basin Petroleum Association are dismayed to learn that the Defenders of Wildlife and the Center for Biological Diversity intend to file suit over the dunes sagebrush lizard,” Ben Shepperd, PBPA president, told the Reporter-Telegram by email. “We strongly believe that the conservation efforts industry has led continue to provide protections for the lizard. The PBPA is committed to protecting the oil and gas industry’s right to operate as well as protecting the lizard’s habitat in meaningful ways.”

The two conservation groups said in a release announcing plans to file the lawsuit that they had petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in May 2018 to list the lizard as threatened or endangered.



That petition also requested the service designate critical habitat for the lizards because thousands of acres where they live are at risk from oil and gas drilling and sand mining projects in Texas and New Mexico.

Under the law, the service is required to evaluate the petition and issue a 90-day finding indicating whether listing may be warranted. If the initial finding is positive, the service must decide whether it intends to list the species within 12 months. The service has now missed both deadlines, and the lizard remains without federal protection, the conservation groups said.

The lizard has been a candidate for listing since 1982, but it wasn't until 2010 that the Fish and Wildlife Service finally proposed listing it as endangered. The Service then declined to list the species in 2012 after approving the Texas Conservation Plan developed by then Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Susan Combs.