

Mount Shasta Herald

Lawsuit focuses on saving rare salamander

By Danielle Jester

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The Center for Biological Diversity, the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, the Environmental Protection Information Center and Cascadia Wildlands are named as plaintiffs in the suit.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Secretary of the United States Department of Interior David Bernhardt are the target of a lawsuit filed by conservation groups on Monday, which claims that the USFWS failed to respond to a 2018 petition requesting Endangered Species Act protection for the Siskiyou Mountains salamander.

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander is a rare species that lives only in the Klamath-Siskiyou region of northern California and southern Oregon.

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The lawsuit details that the plaintiffs submitted a petition to list the Siskiyou Mountains salamander as endangered or threatened pursuant to the ESA. “Under the ESA,” the suit states, “FWS is required to make a 90-day finding ‘as to whether the petition presents substantial scientific and commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted,’” and to determine whether listing the species as endangered or threatened is warranted.

To date, the defendants have failed to make either of those findings, the suit notes, thus violating the ESA. The conservation groups are asking the United States Northern District Court of California to affirm that the defendants have violated the ESA and to establish a date by which the defendants must determine if listing the Siskiyou Mountains salamander as endangered or threatened is warranted.

The Siskiyou Mountains salamander has long had some protections under the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan.

Under that plan, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service were required to survey for rare species like the Siskiyou Mountains Salamander and to designate buffer zones protected from logging where such animals were located.

However, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, “the Western Oregon Plan Revision adopted by the BLM in 2016 substantially increases logging allowed in western Oregon forests, undermining those habitat protections.”

Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center Conservation Director George Sexton stated, “In particular the BLM and Forest Service decisions to target salamander habitat for post-fire logging need to stop if these iconic salamanders are to have a chance to survive and thrive.”