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MINING

Greens sue to save Nev. wildflower from exploration

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Environmentalists have sued the Trump administration to halt lithium exploration among the world's only known population of a rare desert wildflower in Nevada.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed the **lawsuit** yesterday against the Bureau of Land Management in the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada.
The Tucson, Ariz.-based group has already filed an **emergency petition** with the Fish and Wildlife Service to protect Tiehm's buckwheat under the Endangered Species Act.

The wildflower is found only on 20 remote acres of public land in Esmeralda County, Nev.

But the habitat sits atop a rich deposit of lithium where an Australian firm wants to seize on exploding demand for an essential building block of electric vehicle batteries.

On Oct. 19, BLM approved two mineral exploration permits within the proposed area of Ioneer Ltd.'s Rhyolite Ridge project.

At 4.98 acres and 4.04 acres, neither met the minimum size requirement under BLM regulations to trigger a National Environmental Policy Act review.

"These two projects were unlawfully segmented to keep each project under 5 acres and thereby avoid the requirement to file a plan of operations," the center complaint states.

According to the lawsuit, mining activities have already damaged Tiehm's buckwheat. The environmental group requested that the court issue an emergency injunction to stop exploration.

"The administration has a duty to prevent Tiehm's buckwheat from going extinct," said CBD Nevada Director Patrick Donnelly in a statement. "This delicate wildflower plays an integral role in the desert ecosystem by stabilizing soils and dispersing seeds."

In a statement to *The Nevada Independent*, Ioneer said it aims for "environmentally positive production of the critical elements required for the production of green energy. That process requires careful environmental stewardship, including the remediation and propagation of Tiehm's buckwheat."