

NEVADA CURRENT

Trump administration threatened with endangered species suit

By Dana Gentry
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Environmentalists who fear a planned geothermal energy plant in Nevada's Dixie Valley would threaten the existence of a recently discovered species of toad unique to the area notified the Trump administration it plans to sue the Department of Interior over delays in granting an endangered species designation that would stop the development.

The Dixie Valley toad's habitat is restricted to less than 1,500 acres in central Nevada, according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

"The beautiful little toad has large, prominent eyes. Its olive-colored body is dotted with black freckles and rust-colored warts bordered by black halos" the Center said in a news release.

The toads can be found "in remote wetlands fed by thermal desert springs on the western edge of the Dixie Valley Playa in Nevada's Churchill County," according to the Center, which notified the Trump administration Wednesday that it intends to file a lawsuit to protect the toad as well as 274 species across the country deemed to be in danger of extinction.

"To ensure that potential significant adverse effects on these species and their habitats do not occur, the aquatic resources monitoring and mitigation plan would provide a monitoring framework to detect potential adverse effects," says Ormat, the company behind the proposed



Dixie Valley Toad. (Center for Biological Diversity photo)

geothermal plant, in the Department of Energy's environmental impact statement. "It would include recommendations for mitigation measures to reduce, reverse, or prevent such effects if observed," Ormat contends.

Other Nevada species on the Center's list of species yet to be granted protection include spring snails, a rare fish and the whitebark pine.

The Center petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2017 to convey endangered species status to the toad. The effort gained traction in 2018, but Fish and Wildlife has since delayed the process, according to the Center.

In its 30-year history, the Center has gained protections for everything from the Lane Mountain milkvetch, a small plant the grows only in the West Mojave desert, to beluga whales in Alaska's Cook Inlet through targeted litigation.

“Some say our litigation is frivolous but we’ve won most of our cases,” Patrick Donnelly, the Nevada state director of the Center for Biological Diversity, recently told the Current.

Those cases have forced the federal government to list 762 species under the Endangered Species Act and protect more than 725 million acres of habitat from Alaska to Florida.

The Center is alleging the government has failed to implement its own plan for listing endangered species, with most of the delays extending more than five years. The Trump administration has 60 days to take action before a suit is filed.