

## Tiny Northern Nevada toad part of massive endangered species lawsuit

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Conservation group accuses Trump administration of being slow to protect wildlife and habitat in Nevada and beyond

Nevada's tiny Dixie Valley Toad is among the plants and animals included in a massive lawsuit over the Endangered Species Act.

The toad is one of 274 plants and animals included in the lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity, which claims the Trump administration refuses to enforce the landmark conservation law.

The toad's habitat is limited to about 1,500 acres known as Dixie Meadows in Dixie Valley, a remote valley east of Fallon.

A proposed geothermal project 43 miles northeast of Fallon could be harmful to the rare Dixie Valley toad.

In addition to supporting the toad, the valley is a hotbed of geothermal activity. In recent years the area has been targeted as a site for potential development of geothermal power plants.

Energy development could put the toad at risk of extinction, which is why conservationists are pushing for greater protection.



A proposed geothermal project 43 miles northeast of Fallon could be harmful to the rare Dixie Valley toad.  
(Photo: Patrick Donnelly/Center for Biological Diversity)

The Bureau of Land Management is proposing a lease sale on about 80,000 acres of land in the general vicinity of the meadows.

The land is further from toad habitat than a previous geothermal power that appears to have stalled.

But it is a threat to the toad nonetheless, said Patrick Donnelly, Nevada director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

"If you tap the aquifer Dixie Meadows relies on you are going to impact Dixie Meadows," Donnelly said.

Prior to the proposed lease sale, an energy developer sought to place a geothermal power plant at the edge of the toad's habitat.

Donnelly said the recurrence of proposals that could harm the toad, which was only recently identified as a distinct species, shows the need for protection.

"This is totally indicative of why the toad so urgently needs protection," he said.

#### A recent discovery

The Dixie Valley toad is one of three recently discovered species of toad in Nevada.

Dick Tracy, a University of Nevada biology professor, identified the Dixie Valley, Railroad Valley and Hot Creek toad species in 2017 following a 10-year survey of the Great Basin.

Their identification was significant because discovery of new amphibian species in the United States is rare, with only three species of frog discovered since 1985. Prior to Tracy's discovery there hadn't been a new toad species identified in the U.S. since 1968.

Scientists and conservation groups have already established the scientific justification required to show the Dixie Valley species is unique and qualifies for a listing under the Endangered Species Act.

But they say the administration is dragging its feet on the process, which leaves species and habitat vulnerable in the meantime.

They argue the current administration has enacted protection for fewer species than any other administration since the Endangered Species Act became law under President Richard Nixon.

#### Other species in the lawsuit

Other Nevada species in the lawsuit include 20 species of snails, a tiny, rare fish in eastern Nevada and white bark pine. It also includes the American Wolverine, a species that has been spotted in the Sierra Nevada near Truckee, Calif.

The federal government, which enforces the Endangered Species Act through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has not yet responded to the suit.

The Endangered Species Act is credited with helping save the bald eagle, California condor and scores of other animals and plants from extinction since President Richard Nixon signed it into law in 1973. The act currently protects more than 1,600 species in the United States and its territories.