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BUSH EPA SUED FOR NOT PROTECTING BARTON SPRINGS AND SALAMANDER FROM TOXINS

EPA won't consult with wildlife agency, even after pesticide study & salamander deaths

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WASHINGTON DC -- The Center for Biological Diversity and Save Our Springs Alliance filed an important Endangered Species Act (ESA) lawsuit today in U.S. District Court in Washington DC to compel the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the impacts of pesticide use on the endangered Barton Springs salamander.

EPA is responsible for authorizing pesticide use throughout the United States. Through consultation with FWS, EPA must ensure pesticide use does not jeopardize the existence of species listed under the ESA. EPA has shown an ongoing recalcitrance to address the impacts of authorized pesticide use on federally listed species.

“Barton Springs sustains life for people, salamanders and other wildlife in Austin,” said Daniel R. Patterson, an Ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. “But Bush’s EPA is looking out for toxic polluters rather than the health of Texans and their natural heritage. As goes the salamander, so goes human health. Barton Springs must be protected from toxins now.”

The Barton Springs salamander, *Eurycea sosorum*, a federally endangered species, is only found in Barton Springs. Pesticides in the salamander’s habitat were listed as a threat by FWS because of the recognized sensitivity amphibians show to contaminants.



Water quality at Barton Springs is a critical issue for the City of Austin and its citizens. Barton Springs, located within sight of downtown Austin, is the largest spring-fed, natural bottom swimming hole in the country, and is enjoyed by over 340,000 people every year. Barton Springs Pool is a significant addition to Austin’s quality of life and an important tourist attraction. Barton Springs also provides an important part of Austin’s municipal water supply: water from Barton Springs discharges into the Colorado River about 0.6 kilometer upstream of one of Austin’s three water supply plants, at times contributing more than 90 percent of flow in this section of the Colorado River.

“The Barton Springs salamander is our ‘canary in the coal mine’ and the science shows the salamander’s health and habitat are in decline. Once again, an agency charged with enforcing the

law refuses to do so, forcing us to sue,” says Brad Rockwell, deputy director and attorney for Save Our Springs Alliance.

Research by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in 2000 detected five pesticides, including atrazine and deethylatrazine, at Barton Springs. USGS concluded, “the presence of pesticides in the springs soon after rainfall does indicate the vulnerability of the springs to contaminant infiltration from the surface.” Read full report: <http://tx.usgs.gov/reports/dist/dist-2000-02/>

In 2002, FWS suggested that EPA enter into Section 7 consultation, under the ESA, regarding the impact of atrazine on the Barton Springs salamander. FWS also cited concern about other pesticides, specifically, diazinon, prometon, metolachlor, carbaryl, and simazine due to findings from the U.S. Geological Survey which found all of these pesticides in the Barton Springs watershed, posing a risk to the endangered salamanders. These toxins are also a threat to human health.

The Bush administration EPA has ignored FWS’s concerns. Although numerous scientific studies link pesticide use with significant developmental, neurological and reproductive effects to amphibians, EPA refuses to consult with the FWS regarding the impact of pesticides on the Barton Springs salamander. Barton Springs salamanders have been developing strange deformities and dying, which may be linked to pesticide pollution in their habitat. EPA also acknowledges these pesticides may harm human health.

“EPA is ignoring the overwhelming science regarding impacts of pesticides to amphibians. It obstinately refuses to comply with the Endangered Species Act to ensure that the use of pesticides do not jeopardize the survival of listed species,” said Brian Litmans, attorney for the Center and Save Our Springs Alliance.

The decline of the Barton Springs salamander mirrors a disturbing trend of global amphibian decline linked to human causes including deforestation, ozone depletion, draining of wetlands, pollution, increased UV-B radiation, acid rain, and disease.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a science-based environmental advocacy organization that works to protect endangered species and wild places throughout the world through science, policy, education, citizen activism and environmental law. The Center has many members in Texas and is headquartered in Tucson, Arizona, www.biologicaldiversity.org.

The Save Our Springs Alliance is non-profit organization that seeks to protect the Edwards Aquifer, its springs and contributing streams, and the natural and cultural heritage of its Hill Country watersheds, with special emphasis on the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer. Save Our Springs Alliance is headquartered in Austin, Texas, www.sosalliance.org.

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