

## ***Uncommon Alliance Sues To Protect Rare Species Christians, environmentalists to fight wildlife agency***

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Friday, March 5, 1999

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San Francisco -- An unusual coalition of Christians and environmentalists sued a federal agency yesterday in an attempt to save seven endangered species.

The species include an East Bay snake, a Santa Cruz County grasshopper, an unprepossessing Central Coast land snail and a kangaroo rat that lives in Southern California.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, represents the most significant manifestation to date of a growing political phenomenon -- the conjoining of Christians and secular environmentalists to, as one advocate said, ``save God's creatures."

The complaint contends that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consistently violated the federal Endangered Species Act by refusing to designate critical habitat for endangered species -- including the seven included in the suit, which are listed as threatened or endangered under the act.

Amy Hanson, a spokeswoman for Christians Caring For Creation, said that her group supplied ``moral authority" and political clout and that the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity provided the necessary scientific analysis.

Hanson's group is a national prayer network based in Pasadena. The Center for Biological Diversity is a conservation research and lobbying organization with offices in California, Arizona and New Mexico.

``The (biological center) chose the seven species we included in the lawsuit," she said. ``All seven are in great danger of extinction because their homes are being destroyed at a rapid rate, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has refused to identify and map their critical habitats."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Phil Carroll said he could not comment on the suit.

The seven species listed in the suit are:

-- The Alameda whipsnake, a slender black-and-yellow serpent that has suffered because its natural habitat in the East Bay hills has been fragmented by development and cattle grazing.

-- The Zayante band-winged grasshopper, an insect endemic to the Santa Cruz Mountains.

-- The Morro shoulderband snail, a small land snail that lives in San Luis Obispo County sand dunes, a favorite site for luxury home development.

-- The San Bernadino kangaroo rat, a nine-inch-long leaping rodent that has suffered a 95 percent population loss over the years.

-- The spectacled eider and the Stellar's eider, two Alaskan sea ducks that have experienced drastic declines in recent years.

-- The Arroyo toad, a small amphibian that lives in seasonal streams in Southern California and the Baja Peninsula. Its populations have declined by 75 percent as a result of urbanization and dam construction.

Peter Galvin, a conservation biologist for the biological center, said that endangered species can be saved only by preserving their habitats and that the U.S. Endangered Species Act recognizes as much.

Galvin said that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has scamped its duty by consistently refusing to designate critical habitats for endangered species.

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