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10. ENDANGERED SPECIES: Activists deliver another bundle of ESA petitions (07/26/2007)

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

For the second time in less than a month, a Southwestern environmental organization has delivered a multi-species petition to federal officials pressuring action on possible Endangered Species Act listings for hundreds of plants and animals found in the Rocky Mountain region.

On Monday, Denver-based Forest Guardians filed a formal petition seeking ESA protections for 206 imperiled plant and animal species across the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains. Last month, the group filed a similar petition for 475 species ([Land Letter](#), June 28).

Nationwide, there are 1,352 U.S. species protected under the ESA, while Forest Guardians estimate that 6,000-9,000 other species are at risk and should be granted legal protections. The group complained that there have been no new additions to the list since Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne took office more than a year ago ([Land Letter](#), Feb. 22)

"The Endangered Species Act can help address the extinction crisis in the U.S., but native plants and animals do not enjoy any of its protections until they are listed under the Act," said Jay Tutchtou, director of the University of Denver Environmental Law Clinic. "It's time to protect the species most at-risk of extinction with the protective umbrella of our most effective biodiversity protection law."

Many of the species for which Forest Guardians is seeking federal protection are found only within the FWS's Rocky Mountain-Prairie Region.

"Ironically, the majority of endangered species in this country are not listed under the Endangered Species Act. They deserve the vital safety net this effective law provides," observed Nicole Rosmarino of Forest Guardians. She continued, "The service has been asleep at the wheel. We're trying to wake them to safeguard the nation's wildlife and plants before it's too late."

Like the previous petition, this week's filing cites conclusions from [NatureServe](#), a nonprofit conservation organization that maintains a database of information on the status of threatened and endangered species across the United States.

Forest Guardians' petition documents how NatureServe's ranking system represents the "best available science" as required for listing considerations under the act.

According to the filing, petitioned species are either critically imperiled or verging between critically imperiled and imperiled. There are 271 such imperiled species in the Rocky Mountain-Prairie Region, the group said, while 50 of these -- about 18.5 percent -- are either currently listed or candidates for listing under the act. Another 15 species have been the subject of previous petitions.

"The burden is now on the service to tell the public why the most imperiled species in the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains are not being provided with federal protection," Tutchtou said.

Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman Chris Tollefson said "It's gonna be a challenge" to process such a huge combined application, given the agency's already strained budget for ESA work.