

Groups threaten to sue wildlife agency over snowfly

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Several environmental groups, including the Save the Poudre Coalition, are threatening to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if the agency does not soon respond to a petition to protect the Arapahoe snowfly under the Endangered Species Act.

The snowfly is only known to exist along two streams draining into Poudre Canyon, including Elkhorn Creek and Young Gulch, home to a popular mountain biking trail.

The environmental groups filed their petition with the Fish and Wildlife Service in April, but the agency did not make a decision about whether the snowfly was threatened enough for the service to consider protecting it.

The Fish and Wildlife Service "gave the standard response: They have other things to do," said Nicole Rosmarino of WildEarth Guardians, who sent a letter to the agency Wednesday informing it that the environmental groups intend to sue if it doesn't act within 60 days.

"They haven't given us an indication of when they'll come out with a finding," Rosmarino said. "The only way to get the Fish and Wildlife Service to issue decisions on petitions is to go to court. This is the first step toward going to court over the Arapahoe snowfly."

Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman Diane Katzenberger said the agency is working on its decision about the snowfly, and it is due to be published in the Federal Register in April.

She said the agency is cash-strapped and short-staffed, and it hasn't been able to get around to fully evaluating the snowfly's status until recently.

The snowfly is an "indicator species," which indicates the health of an ecosystem, said Gary

Wockner of Save the Poudre.

Should the snowfly go extinct, it is a harbinger of environmental decay in Poudre Canyon, he said.

"The snowfly merits listing as an endangered

species, and all species deserve to have a place on this planet, and if they go extinct, that is just wrong," he said.

The groups' original petition for the snowfly's protection under the Endangered Species Act said the biggest threat to the insect is the high volume of dogs, hikers and cyclists who trample and defecate in the snowfly's habitat in Young Gulch.

In Elkhorn Creek, grazing and resort effluent have nearly driven the fly to extinction.