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Fort Collins, Colorado
Monday, December 6, 2010 | 37°F

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Local groups hold lawsuit over threatened bug

by RACHEL CHILDS
The Rocky Mountain Collegian

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last edited: 10:22 pm 12/05/2010

A local insect is the center of a potential lawsuit between environmental coalitions and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, or USFWS.

Citizens and environmental groups, including the Save the Poudre Coalition and the Cache La Poudre River Foundation, filed a 60-day notice of intention to sue after the USFWS failed to respond to a petition that requested the Arapahoe snowfly be protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The petition was filed in April of this year, and USFWS should have rendered a decision 90 days after in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, but one was never announced. The filing of the intent to sue notice is in response to this violation.

"Every day that a species waits for environmental protection is a day closer to their extinction," said Nicole Rosmarino, wildlife program director for WildEarth Guardians.

Rosmarino's organization filed the intention to sue, adding that this violation of the Endangered Species Act is not a new issue. WildEarth Guardians has experienced lags in response before and Rosmarino said the USFWS is dragging its feet.

"This is a very effective law, but it is not effective for a species that is not listed under it," Rosmarino said.

The Arapahoe snowfly, also known as the winter snowfly, is a species of stonefly that has been seen specifically in Elkhorn Creek and Young's Gulch. It is seen as an important water pollution indicator due to its sensitivity to water conditions.

"If the snowfly goes extinct then that's a harbinger of deteriorating water quality," said Sarina Jepsen, endangered species program director for the Xerces Society. Jepsen wrote the petition requesting the snowfly be protected.

Human activity along the Poudre River has depleted the snowfly population throughout the years and continues to threaten the species.

"This won't be the first insect in Colorado to go extinct due to human impact," said Boris C Kondratieff, the CSU entomologist who discovered the Arapahoe snowfly and contributed to the petition.

Two or three species of stonefly have already disappeared from the Poudre, according to Kondratieff. Though the ecological impact will not be great if the Arapahoe Stonefly disappears, he said species across the globe are going extinct as a result of human activity and projects that compromise natural habitats.

"It's more of a symbol of what could happen in the future," Kondratieff said.

The USFWS told the coalitions that they will make a decision in fiscal year 2011-2012, but have provided no specific dates in writing, Rosmarino said.

Crime Beat Reporter Rachel Childs can be reached at news@collegian.com.

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