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Highly Imperiled Utah Fish Denied Endangered Species Act Protection

Least Chub Is Fifth Species in Month Denied Protection by Federal Agency's Rocky Mountain Region

SALT LAKE CITY— In a reversal of a 2010 finding that it deserved federal protection, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today [decided](#) Utah's highly imperiled [least chub](#) does not warrant Endangered Species Act protection. It's the fifth such reversal by the agency's Rocky Mountain Region in less than a month, including the American wolverine, two rare Colorado plants and Montana grayling. Regional administrators haven't protected a species in more than three years and overall has only protected five species in 14 years, including just three of the 229 protected by the Obama administration so far.

"It feels like we're still in the Bush administration at the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director with the Center for Biological Diversity. "All of these five species are highly endangered and need protection. This is reaching a point where there needs to be an investigation into the decision-making process for endangered species at the region."

Least chub were once widely distributed in the rivers, streams, marshes and springs over much of Utah west of the Wasatch Front, where they fed on small invertebrates, such as mosquito larvae. Today they are found naturally in just six complexes of springs and ponds, and are threatened by a combination of factors, including nonnative species, such as mosquito fish, as well as livestock grazing, suburban sprawl, groundwater pumping and climate change. Since 2010 the fish has also been reintroduced into 10 additional waters, but it's too early to tell how many of these populations will persist.

"The least chub occurs in just a tiny fraction of the streams it once occurred in and remains very fragile," said Greenwald. "Endangered Species Act protection would have ensured that conservation efforts continued and were successful."

Some threats to the chub have been reduced since the Center and others petitioned to protect the chub in 2007. Most notably, plans by the Southern Nevada Water Authority to pump massive amounts of groundwater from the Snake Valley, where three of the chub's natural populations occur, appear in doubt. The state of Utah and Bureau of Land Management have also reduced livestock grazing pressure for some populations and secured water rights in a couple cases.

"We're glad some of the threats to the least chub have been reduced, but given its limited range and other ongoing threats, this unique little fish clearly still warrants endangered status," said Greenwald.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 775,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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