

Endangered list: Is it out of control?

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SANTA CRUZ — They slither, jump, bloom, soar and ooze through the Santa Cruz area, some more magnificent than others, but all able to slow or stop development, farming, logging and use of an area.

They are the more than 45 plants, animals and insects considered threatened or endangered species in Santa Cruz County.

The names include Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, the Monarch butterfly, the Dolloff cave spider, the Empire Cave pseudoscorpion, the Santa Cruz tarplant, the Scotts Valley spineflower and most recently, the marbled murrelet.

The list, which is growing as more and more species become endangered, has led some to ask when will it stop, and why try to save them all.

"The marbled murrelet is the latest icon. It's part of the trend

of the future," said Big Creek Lumber owner Bud McCrary. "It doesn't end with the marbled murrelet, we have people talking about rare lichens, tree mosses and insects. Where does it all end? ... What kind of economy are we going to have when we only have a service economy? If you can't grow forests, mine coal and iron, where will we get the building materials?"

McCrary and other businessmen see the endangered species list and its accompanying restrictions as being used to shut down logging and other business. They point to the recent removal of 11.6 million acres of timberland from harvest in order to protect the spotted owl.

Professor Michael Soule, chairman of the board of environmental studies at UC Santa Cruz, said that economic arguments are not enough to warrant the destruction of a species.

"Hundreds and hundreds of species have become extinct in

the last thousand years, not one a natural extinction, but all caused by humans," Soule said. "We often ask the question what is the importance (of a species) as if when God created life each species has to be important — especially to humans ... When a species dies it can not be replenished. We are the most powerful and have a responsibility to protect the (other) species."

Most extinctions, Soule said, are due to man's "greed and need for land" due to overpopulation. The loss of species in Santa Cruz is significant over the past decades, he said.

"People forget that 50 years ago there were black bears, grizzlies, wolves, eagles and condors here," Soule said. "All of these driven to extinction (locally) by humans. Now we're down to the smaller species that are slowly being driven out. There are virtually no large animals left. We have to draw the line. No extinction is permissible."

The debate, and recent flurries of candidates for the endangered species list, eventually ends up at the Department of Fish and Game, which is in charge of determining which species makes the list and how to protect it.

"It's almost bankrupt the department," said Don Pine, a fish and game biologist, of the numbers of studies the department now handles. "You have to remember the public passed these laws (endangered species acts) requesting we do this. It will end when the public says it doesn't want them protected and I don't think that will happen."

In the meantime the department of fish and game hires more and more biologists to special in the study of endangered species, and the list keeps growing.

"We don't have a quota (as to how many species will be listed), either they are endangered or they are not," Pine said. "We won't give up trying to save (a species) as long as there is a single (individual animal) left."