

# Critical habitat finalized for three California species, fourth proposed

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — The federal government set critical habitat for three California species Wednesday, and proposed such habitat for a fourth.

The court-prompted designations for the arroyo toad, the Zayante band-winged grasshopper and the Morro shoulderband snail mean that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will have to be consulted on developments that need federal approval.

The toad designation had been announced last month, but a backlog of last-minute Clinton administration decisions meant it wasn't official until Wednesday.

Fish and Wildlife also proposed that just over 300,000 acres to be critical habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly in San Diego and Riverside counties.

The designations require developers to consult with Fish and Wildlife only if their project uses federal funds or requires federal permits.

"Development will not come to a grinding halt"

because of the toad designation, said Jane Hendron, a Carlsbad-based Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman. "This will better educate people about the arroyo toad and its specific habitat needs. Everybody assumes that because it's an amphibian, they live on the water."

But once they graduate from the tadpole stage, the toad prefers upland areas. That's why its critical habitat extends nearly a mile from streams and creeks — or 80 feet of elevation, whichever is closest.

All four actions stemmed from settlements

between Fish and Wildlife and the Center for Biological Diversity, a Tucson, Ariz.-based environmental group that sued to force the federal agency to reconsider previous rejections of requests that it declare critical habitat.

Christians Caring for Creation was a co-plaintiff in the three finalized actions, which declare 2,566 acres in western San Luis Obispo County for the snail; 10,560 acres in Santa Cruz County for the grasshopper; and 182,360 acres for the toad along streams and creeks in eight California

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counties from Monterey to San Diego.

"Overall these decisions today will in fact provide substantial additional federal protection for declining wildlife habitats," said David Hogan, urban wildlands coordinator for the Center for Biological Diversity.

But he added that the habitat designation for the toad is not enough to save it from extinction, and said his group is considering whether to file another lawsuit to expand the species' territory.

At issue are about 94,000 acres — including 39,000 acres of the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton — that had

been part of Fish and Wildlife's original critical habitat proposal but were excluded from the final version.

Fish and Wildlife officials say toads on the Marine base are among the few remaining populations along the coastal plain. But the agency agreed to remove the base from its action after Marine officials said the designation would greatly hinder training operations, and that other rules the base must follow will assure the toad is protected.

The critical habitat finalized for the grasshopper and the snail are the same as the ones that were originally proposed, Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Lois Grunwald said.